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THE TIME IN-BETWEEN:

THE INTEGRATION AND EMPLOYMENT OF ASYLUM SEEKERS IN NORTHERN
FINLAND

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The persistent upward trend in the total number of refugees and asylum seekers over the past six years is one of the most significant challenges of the twenty-first century. The most recent report from the UN Refugee Agency, the UNHCR, claims that as of June 30th, 2018 a total of 70.4 million individuals were forcibly displaced worldwide as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, or human rights violations. The most recent Refugee Crisis peaked in Europe around 2015-2016, when roughly 1.45 million people applied for asylum in Europe. The sudden and intense influx of asylum seekers had a deep and lasting impact on the whole of Europe. This challenge continues to divide and define the Union as its 28 member states grapple with how to allocate resources in order to mitigate this massive humanitarian crisis.

There is a growing recognition that employment is one of the most significant means of refugee integration and that the earlier refugees and asylum seekers are introduced into the labor market the easier it is for them to integrate into society. This research investigates the impact of Startup Refugees (SUR) a non-profit voluntary network, on the integration of asylum seekers into the Finnish labor market. This qualitative exploratory case study examines the role of SUR in the integration process, focusing on the network's Northern branch. It illustrates how SUR leverages social capital to secure employment for asylum seekers. Primary data is drawn from the author's fieldwork over the course of fifteen months and nine semi-structured interviews with various stakeholders in the integration process. The findings of this study suggest that asylum seekers contribute to the Finnish economy and can help grow businesses and lower the dependency ratio. However, the study finds that under the current system, it is risky and difficult for companies to employ asylum seekers. It supports the funding of initiatives like SUR and close cooperation between public, private, and third sector actors regarding this issue.

Keywords: Asylum Policy, Asylum Seekers, Employment, Integration, Immigration, NGO, Social Capital

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1 Introduction

The persistent upward trend in the total number of refugees and asylum seekers over the past six years is one of the most significant challenges of the twenty-first century. The most recent report from the UN Refugee Agency, the UNHCR, claims that as of June 30th, 2018 a total of 70.4 million individuals were forcibly displaced worldwide as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, or human rights violations (*“Mid-year Trends”*, 2018, 3). However, this escalation remains unevenly distributed as 2017 was a year of transition and relative stability in Europe (Mang, 2017). The most recent Refugee Crisis peaked in Europe around 2015-2016, when roughly 1.45 million people applied for asylum in Europe (ibid). The sudden and intense influx of asylum seekers had a deep and lasting impact on the whole of Europe. This challenge continues to divide and define the Union as its 28 member states grapple with how to allocate resources in order to mitigate this massive humanitarian crisis.

In the fourth quarter of 2018, Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union reported that the number of first-time asylum applications into the EU-28 had decreased by 2% (Eurostat, 2019, 1). However, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), an agency of the European Union set up by Regulation 439/2010 of the European Parliament and of the Council, reports that despite the year-to-year decrease in asylum applications there was a slight upward trend throughout 2018 (EASO, 2018, 4). This may be related to several serious factors, which suggest that a new wave of asylum seekers is probable, including but not limited to the urgent and growing impact of climate change, ongoing conflict in a number of nation-states bordering Europe, and emerging political and economic tensions in various regions. Therefore, it is important to continually and critically evaluate different integration strategies in order to learn from effective policies and applications. The use of specific case studies works to highlight certain effective practices, which can help inform future decisions.

There is a growing recognition that employment is one of the most significant means of refugee integration and that integrating refugees and asylum seekers into the labor market can be beneficial not only to the individuals but to society as a whole (Burchett & Matheson, 2010; Egan & Tomlinson, 2002; Government Action Plan on Asylum Policy, 2015; Hainuller, Hangartner & Lawrence, 2016; Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2016; Minis-

try of the Interior, 2018). Finland is an interesting case as, unlike many other European countries, beneficiaries of international protection have an unrestricted right to work. According to Finnish law, asylum seekers have the right to work three months after submitting their asylum application with a valid passport or six months after without a valid travel document (“Asylum seekers right to work,” 2019). However, in practice, finding gainful employment is hampered by insufficient language skills, limited social networks, and employers’ preconceptions (European Migration Network, 2015, 4; Aaltonen and Rekila, 2016).

Before 2015, Finland’s role as a refugee receiving country was relatively small, however, that changed in late summer 2015 when Finland received 32,476 asylum applications, approximately ten times what it received the previous year (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2016, 14). Additionally, the Union agreed on certain burden-sharing mechanisms, which meant that in 2016 and 2017 Finland also received a number of asylum seekers and refugees as international transfers. In December of 2015, the Finnish government published an action plan on asylum policy in response to the sharp increase in the number of asylum seekers. The plan includes more than 80 measures falling under the responsibility of different administrative sectors (Government Action Plan on Asylum Policy, 2015). It was evident by 2016 that at least the initial goal of stopping the uncontrolled flow of asylum seekers into the country had been met. However, the broader goal of integrating these asylum seekers into Finnish society will be a challenge for years to come. The Finnish government is working to refine these policies as the situation continues to evolve. There is, however, it has been acknowledgment that the government cannot cope with this situation alone. There is a general agreement that non-government organizations (NGOs) play a decisive role in delivering welfare services to the public (Chenhall, Hall, & Smith, 2010). In 2017, the European Migration Network’s Annual Report on Migration and Asylum in Finland described the contribution of non-government organizations and volunteers as having a significant impact on the early stages of asylum seeking in Finland. Startup Refugees is one such organization, specifically named in the Report (44).

Startup Refugees (SUR) is a self-described ‘social innovation’, launched in November of 2015. It is comprised of a network of individual actors, companies, public institutions, and other third sector partners with the shared goal of harnessing the entrepreneurial and professional skills of asylum seekers for the betterment of Finnish society (“*Startup Refugees | Home*”, 2019). The voluntary network gained national attention as the first organization to go

into reception centers and collect data about the educational background and skills of the people housed within. In the time since, the organization has grown significantly expanding operations throughout Finland with talks of expanding to other European countries. The purpose of this qualitative case study is to describe the influence of Startup Refugee's Northern Branch, in cooperation with local businesses, municipalities, and various governmental organizations on the integration of asylum seekers and refugees into the labor market in Northern Finland.

1.1 Locating the Study

This study aims to inform the policy debate by presenting a more holistic view of integration efforts in Northern Finland. This research adds to existing literature exploring the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Finland. There exists a fair amount of studies about refugees and asylum seekers published in Finnish (see Lyytinen, 2016), however, as the situation is continually evolving there remains much to be explored. Additionally, there have been a number of studies in English covering different facets of the Finnish integration system. This includes studies on the overarching policy framework guiding the integration of refugees in Finland (Macharo, 2018). Work has also been done documenting how earlier immigrants from refugee-sending countries have fared in the Finnish labor market, results Sarvimäki categorizes as “rather bleak” (Sarvimäki, 2017, 1). Unfortunately, there is evidence to corroborate this sentiment as previous studies suggest that even just two decades ago there were indicators that, “a process of *disempowerment* may be occurring in the early resettlement process” (Valtonen, 1998, 57, *italics original*). There is a growing recognition both in Finland and abroad that political associations and informal networks can be a resource for refugees and other vulnerable groups in combating social and economic marginalization (Gray, Bebbington, & Collison, 2006; Chenhall, Hall, & Smith, 2010; Wahlbeck, 2012). There has been some research into the attitudes of Finnish employers towards the possibility of hiring asylum seekers (Aaltonen & Rekila, 2016). However, there remains a gap in research regarding what happens after asylum seekers find work and how they managed to acquire said employment.

The data presented here was gathered over the course of fifteen months between the spring of 2018 to the summer of 2019. Primary data is derived from nine semi-structured interviews as well as extensive fieldwork with the organization. In the spring of 2019, I was also employed by the organization for a period of two months, during which time I had access to additional

data sources and was able to glean a clearer understanding of the organization's working culture. The research presented here draws on information gathered from relevant stakeholder groups in the employment process including: asylum seekers who have been employed in the region, managers in companies that have hired asylum seekers, and third sector employees who have been either directly or indirectly responsible for helping asylum seekers find work. This is the first study of its kind to present the perceptions of these stakeholder groups in tandem. Secondary data includes internet sources, governmental policy documents, and scientific literature; which form the scientific and theoretical foundation of this research.

1.2 Research Questions

Existing research accepts the idea that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have an impact on the integration of asylum seekers into society (Gray, Bebbington, & Collison, 2006; Chenhall, Hall, & Smith, 2010; Wahlbeck, 2012). My own personal experience supports this belief. This thesis endeavors to describe the role of one such organization, Startup Refugees. In conducting this research, I became aware of a number of challenges experienced by various stakeholders in the integration process. Therefore, the primary questions that guide this research are:

1. What is the role of the organization Startup Refugees in the integration of asylum seekers and refugees into the labor market in Finland?
2. What challenges have the various stakeholders involved in the integration and employment process experienced?

The study is organized as follows: the following chapter will review relevant literature on the topic of asylum policy in Finland, specifically, concerning integration and employment. It will also examine the organization Startup Refugees in detail. The third chapter will explore Social Capital Theory and Intergroup Contact Theory and their application in the labor market. Chapter four will introduce the methodology employed in the design of this study. The fifth chapter will analyze my findings and the sixth chapter will discuss the theoretical and practical implications of the work, along with limitations and suggestions for future study.

2 Background

This chapter will serve to provide a more comprehensive picture of the situation of asylum seekers and refugees in Finland, as well as introduce the organization Startup Refugees. The first section will help orient the reader to the specific terms used throughout this research and the meanings assigned to them. The second section will delve into the legislative environment in Finland in regard to asylum seekers and refugees. This will be followed by an examination of various integration efforts, with a focus on labor market integration. This chapter concludes with a more in-depth look at the non-profit organization Startup Refugees, the focus of this study.

2.1 Definition of Terms

This section is designed to aid in the readers' overall understanding of the topic by providing a short introduction to various terms that will be used throughout the research. Some of these terms can be interpreted in different ways, however, for the purpose of this research the definitions are as follows:

Asylum seeker: The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees defines an asylum seeker as, "An individual who is seeking international protection. In countries with individualized procedures, an asylum-seeker is someone whose claim has not yet been finally decided on by the country in which the claim is submitted" (Refugees, 2005). The Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration in Finland defines an asylum seeker as, "a person seeking international protection under the Aliens Act¹" (301/2004). The government emphasizes that an asylum seeker "has no residence permit in Finland" (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2016, 73).

Refugee: According to the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment in Finland a refugee is, "a foreigner who has a justified reason to fear persecution because of his or her origin, religion, nationality, membership in a certain social group or political opinion. Refugee status is conferred to a person to whom asylum is granted by a state or who is deemed a refugee by the UN's Refugee Council" (ibid, 72).

¹ All legislative documents cited were taken from unofficial English translations and are legally binding only in Finnish and Swedish

Integration: The Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration defines integration as the “interactive development involving immigrants and society at large, the aim of which is to provide immigrants with the knowledge and skills required in society and working life and to provide them with support, so that they can maintain their culture and language; integration also means the multi-sectoral promotion and support of integration...using the measures and services provided by the authorities and other parties” (362/2005; 1215/2005).

Match Clinic: Startup Refugee jargon, referring to the act of collecting data about [a] specific individual[s] for the purpose of adding them to the Startup Refugee database. The term is used interchangeably with ‘data collection’ and is one of the main functions of the network. It involves using the online platform Match Made in Startup Refugees (“Match - made in Startup Refugees”) to create a Curriculum Vitae (CV) for an individual. The system goes through a series of prompts (see Appendix 1), which are designed to collect information about an individual's personal, educational, and professional background. After completing the online form the system generates a formatted CV (see Appendix 2). The CV exists in a secure online database, which allows SUR employees to ‘match’ candidates from the system with potential employers.

The distinction between an asylum seeker and a refugee is of particular importance in this study. Asylum seekers’ precarious legal status in-effect disqualifies them from a number of governmental services, leaving them in political and socio-economic limbo. In contrast, refugees, have received a decision from a higher body that their asylum claim has merit. This distinction is significant as it affords refugees more legal rights in Finland. The following section will expand on this point and contextualize Finland’s current policy on asylum.

2.2 Asylum Policy in Finland

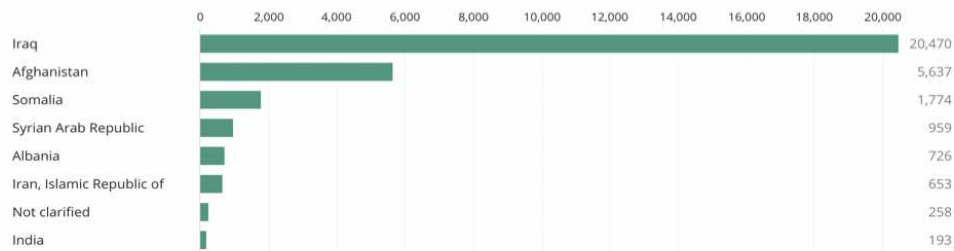
First, it may be useful to briefly recall the history of refugees and asylum seekers in Finland. In his report for VATT Institute for Economic Research, Matti Sarvimaki documents the “long, if often forgotten” history of Finland as a recipient of refugees (2017, 3). Sarvimaki describes Finland as the natural first destination of defecting Russians after the Russian Revolution in 1922. He then recounts the time during World War II, when 430,000 people were internally displaced from areas ceded to the Soviet Union (ibid). Additionally, 63,000 Ingrian Finns were moved to Finland during the war. Sarvimaki draws the reader's attention to the striking difference in policy application between these two groups. The displaced population

was eventually resettled and given compensation for their lost property. In contrast, the Ingrian Finns were returned to the Soviet Union at the conclusion of the war. Sarvimaki describes this as a turning point for Finland's refugee policy. After which, immigration was heavily restricted and "virtually no one was granted asylum" save for a few slight loosening in the 1970s (ibid, 3). The next notable increase in the number of individuals seeking international protection was in the mid-1980s (Mwacharo, 2018; Pehkonen, 2006; Sarvimaki, 2017; Saukkonen, 2016; Valtonen, 1998). However, it is significant to note that while historically Finland has been a destination for migrants, the size and scale of the most recent wave of asylum seekers into Finland in 2015-2016 has not been seen since World War II.

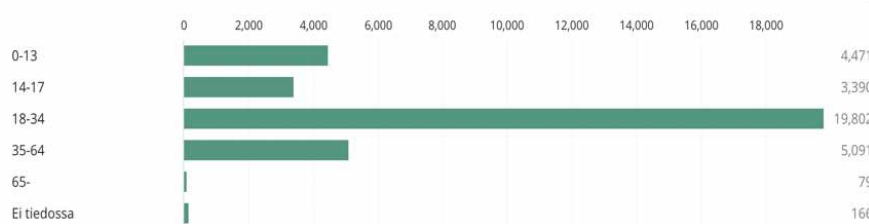
According to statistics provided by the Finnish Immigration Service, the number of asylum applications experienced a moderate increase in May of 2015, with most of the applications originating from Somalia ("Tilastot — Maahanmuuttovirasto," 2019). One month later the number of asylum applications from Iraq rose dramatically, overtaking the number of applications from Somalia by almost double. Over the next two months, the number of applications from Iraq continued to rise until it finally peaked in the autumn of 2015. In September 2015, Finland received 9,101 asylum applications from Iraq alone (ibid). Between July 2015 and March 2016, Finland received over 31,500 asylum applications, with an overwhelming majority of these applications coming from Iraqi men age eighteen to thirty-four. The demographic makeup of the asylum applications received during this time can be found in *Figure 1*. The government's response to this rapid increase in asylum applications is multifaceted and will be explored in detail in the following paragraphs.

Finland's current migration policy is comprised of four distinct elements: the current Government Programme (19 May 2015), the Government migration policy (11 September 2015) and the Government action plan on asylum policy (8 December 2015). These policies and related legislation are said to be based on the fundamental rights laid down in the Constitution of Finland, EU legislation, international human rights accords, and other treaties ratified by Finland (*International Migration 2017–2018 - Report for Finland*, 2018, 13). The following section will begin by exploring the current legislative environment regarding asylum seekers in Finland, in order to better understand the current political and economic situation in the country.

Citizenship



Age Group



Gender

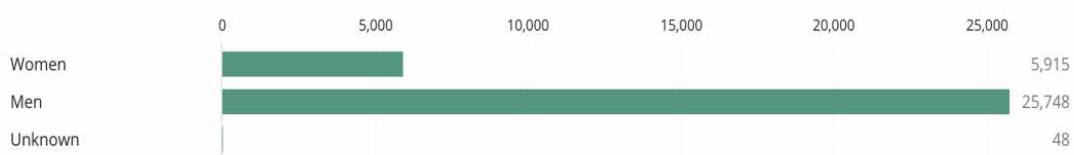


Figure 1 — Demographics of asylum seekers entering Finland between July 2015 to March 2016 (Finnish Immigration Service Statistics)

2.2.1 Legislative Environment

The Constitution of Finland guarantees the “inviolability of human dignity and the freedom and rights of the individual as well as promoting justice in society” (17 July 1995/969). In this pursuit, Finland promises to engage in international co-operation for the protection of peace and human rights for the development of society. Additionally, the Constitution states that “no alien may be expelled, extradited or returned if, on account of this, he risks the death penalty, torture or other degrading treatment” (17 July 1995/969). These principles lay the legal foundation for Finland’s ideology concerning asylum policy. Other relevant legal documents are: the Aliens Act, the Administrative Judicial Procedure Act, the Act on the Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers, and the Non-Discrimination Act.

The Aliens Act applies to all foreign nationals living in Finland. It is meant to provide the foundation for good governance and legal protection concerning aliens. This document covers

a number of relevant topics concerning asylum seekers and refugees' rights, including their right to legal and translatative services. This legislation also outlines the requirements for providing international protection (Chapter 6). Beyond that, it breaks down the specific asylum procedures that must be followed when issuing a residence permit to a person applying for asylum. Furthermore, it documents an immigrant's legal right to employment, specifying that asylum seekers have the right to work, even without a residence permit (549/2010). It also refers to the Administrative Judicial Procedure Act, which guarantees the applicant the right to appeal their asylum decision up to three times. In July of 2018, an EU directive aimed at streamlining granting and withdrawing refugee status came into force (European Commission, 2018). In principle, the terms of this new regulation set a time-limit for the examination of applications, however, in practice wait times can still drag on for a number of legal reasons.

The Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration defines the state's responsibilities in regard to asylum seekers and divides the work between different governmental bodies, municipalities, and service providers. The purpose of the Act is described as being to;

Promote the integration, equality, and freedom of choice of immigrants through measures which help them to acquire the essential knowledge and skills they need to function in society, and to ensure support and care for asylum seekers and beneficiaries of temporary protection in the context of a mass influx by arranging for their reception (1269/2006).

Based on this, it can be argued that in this case integration is synonymous with education. As the government, in facilitating the acquisition of knowledge and skills, is acting to promote the education of asylum seekers and the native population in order for them to coexist in society. However, as the government is working with limited resources as well as navigating the precarious politics of public opinion, pertaining to spending too much on foreign nationals. Therefore, it has seen fit to outsource a portion of this responsibility to other organizations both private and third sector. The Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration applies to all immigrants, including asylum seekers. Apart from the assignment to a municipality, the arrangement of housing, and pre-departure cultural orientation classes (for quota refugees only), integration services have not been separately tailored for asylum seekers (European Migration Network, 2015, 4). This lack of specialized service leaves a gap in the market for organizations who can offer tailored services to asylum seekers and refugees.

2.2.2 New Legislation

A number of other new processes and procedures concerning asylum seekers and refugees have been amended and implemented since 2017. On the first of January 2017, initial tasks in the asylum process were transferred from the Police and the Border Guard to the Finnish Immigration Service (Immigration Department, 2018, 20). This gives the responsibility of establishing an asylum seeker's identity, entry into the country and travel route, and serving positive decisions to Immigration Services (Maahanmuuttovirasto). The appeals process was modified, decentralizing matters related to international protection and turning over decisions to four administrative courts. In addition, a number of steps were taken to help establish the legitimacy of the asylum claim. The Immigration Department also alleges that voluntary return was made 'more attractive' by increasing the amount of monetary assistance provided, however, despite this the police report that asylum seekers are clearly less willing to return voluntarily (ibid, 12).

Since 2017, asylum seekers have had access to payment cards (Moni cards). These cards were used to pay financial benefits to asylum seekers, officially termed their reception allowance. The cards were also meant to "improve asylum seekers opportunities to engage in gainful employment and earn their own livelihood" (Immigration Department, 2018, 22). However, on March 28th of 2019, it was announced that the use of these cards would be halted by the 30th of April of the same year. The announcement was made on the Immigration Service's website, which read, "We are replacing the cards on short notice because no longer will there be support available for Moni cards. We apologize for the rapid schedule" ("*Turvapaikanhakijoiden maksukortit vaihtuvat PFS-kortteihin huhtikuussa 2019 – Moni-kortit lakkaavat toimimasta 30.4.*," 2019). The cards were replaced with PFS cards, which are linked to an Irish bank account. This change was due in part to the fact that each PFS card has its own number, while Moni card account needed a reference number. Reputedly, PFS cards do not require this reference number (ibid). These cards are essential to ensure that asylum seekers are able to receive a salary when working as without a residence permit, asylum seekers are unable to open a Finnish bank account.

On May 22, 2019, the Finnish Migration Service announced that, due to an amendment to the Aliens Act, there would be changes to asylum seekers' right to work coming into effect on the first of June 2019 ("Amendments to the Aliens Act on 1 June 2019," 2019). The new changes

apply to all asylum seekers regardless of their day they submitted their application. The first change is that an asylum seeker's right to work ends when the decision becomes 'enforceable'. This means the date when the person can be legally removed from the country. This would mean that if the asylum seeker receives two negative decisions from the Finnish Migration Service and the Administrative Court and does not appeal to the Supreme Court, then the decision is final, and they no longer have the right to work. The announcement also says, "if an asylum seeker has already received a negative decision or has submitted a new application and the previous decision is enforceable, he or she will no longer have the right to work as of 1 June 2019" (ibid). A related change is that asylum seekers must request a certificate for the right to work starting June 1st, 2019. In order to get this certificate the requesting party must pay a fee of 20 Euros, fill out a form requesting the certificate from the Finnish Immigration Service, and send the form, the receipt of payment, and a copy of their identity document either by encrypted email or through the post ("Asylum seekers can request for a certificate of their right to work from the Finnish Immigration Service starting from 1 June 2019," 2019). Employers are still required to verify an asylum seeker's right to work in Finland. However, they can no longer get the information directly from the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri). Employees who do not have this certificate need to request one from Migri by the aforementioned date (ibid). This post was subsequently removed the Immigration Services website with an updated post declaring:

The law change has been complicated: the interpretation of the law has been challenging and has had to be discussed more than usual within the Agency and with the Ministry of the Interior. We have removed old bulletins from our website so that the information they contain no longer confuses customers and employers.

The announcement posted on the Finnish Immigration Service's on the fifth of June demonstrates just how quickly policies can be changed and just how divisive these decisions can be. SUR applied pressure on Migration Services to clarify their statements effectively acting as an advocate for worker rights. The new changes now apply only to applications submitted after June first, 2019. However, it is unclear from the Migri website if new applicants will still have to request a certificate for the right to work. The announcement also repealed the decision to close the employer phone line, instead providing a link to the number and their opening hours ("Korjaus," 2019).

The latest changes in policy regarding asylum seekers' right to work suggest that the government could be taking steps to limit their right to work. This is counter to advice from the Association of Local and Regional Authorities in Finland as well as other EU documents, which support strengthening integration initiatives related to employment. The confusion surrounding the Finnish Immigration Service's latest announcement demonstrates how important it is to have advocacy groups, like SUR, involved in the process to help asylum seekers and companies understand and react to the latest policy changes. Other trends in integration and employment of asylum seekers, will be examined in the following section.

2.3 Integration and Employment

The Strategic Program of Prime Minister Juha Sipilä's Government emphasizes the importance of labor migration in order to enhance employment, improve the dependency ratio of the economy, and boost public finances (Immigration Department, 2018, 13). According to Statistics Finland's projection, the proportion of working-age people in the population will drop from 64 to 59 percent by 2030 and to 57 percent by 2060 (Rapo, 2015). A related report indicates that the annual number of migrants should be increased to 34,000 to avoid a reduction in the labor force and to respond to Finland's labor needs in the coming decades (Ministry of the Interior, 2018, 14). However, based on Finland's response to the Refugee Crisis it appears asylum seekers are not the type of immigrants this government desires. Finland has repeatedly refused calls to raise the number of quota refugees they accept per year ("Finland to take in 750 quota refugees, ignoring calls to raise figure," 2017). Also, as illustrated in the previous section, the government has recently proposed steps which restrict asylum seekers right to work. This is despite various studies, which suggest that asylum seekers, on average, tend to be highly skilled and extremely motivated to work (Egan & Tomlinson, 2002; Burchett & Matheson, 2010; Pile, 1997).

2.3.1 Integration

When the crisis hit in 2015 the government's primary directive was to stem the uncontrolled flow of asylum seekers into the country (Government action plan on asylum policy, 2015). One of the ways they did this was by tightening requirements for issuing residence permits to asylum seekers (Saukkonen, 2016, 8). It appears that the political and legislative agenda is

more concerned with controlling numbers and assessing the current threat level of the migrants' countries of origin than helping refugees immigrate. The latest scheme to make voluntary return more attractive and the government's unwillingness to take on more quota refugees undermine its attempts to integrate refugees into society. This sort of underlying attitude hampers legitimate programs designed to encourage integration.

In Finland, the starting point for providing integration services is the individual service needs of the immigrant, making it possible to take into account the individual's situation. However, these services are confined to those to whom protectionary status is conferred. These services are not provided to asylum seekers awaiting a decision. Asylum seekers are entitled to Finnish language classes, however, based on existing literature and personal experience, other activities (educational and recreational) are provided mostly through voluntary organizations.

Finnish integration policy only requires an integration plan be drawn up for immigrants who have a valid residence permit. According to the Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration, asylum seekers are entitled to “accommodation, social assistance, essential social and health care services, interpretation services and fulfillment of all other basic needs. Work and study activities may also be arranged” (362/2005). The final sentence of this mandate is quite vague, it implies that these activities may be arranged, but they are not guaranteed. In practice, it is quite difficult for asylum seekers and even those granted residence in Finland to find work or to secure a study place. This is in large part due to stringent language requirements. In fact, the European Migration Network goes so far as to say, “**the language skills requirement** for immigrants is **unreasonable** and they are not offered a study place if there are Finnish applicants available” (European Migration Network, 2015, 5, bold original). This is not the only issue as, despite a number of actions to promote the education of immigrants in Finland, immigrants, particularly refugees and asylum seekers, have a hard time getting their previous degrees recognized (*Working together for local integration of migrants and refugees*, 2018). This situation is not unique to Finland and is a well-documented issue for asylum seekers around the world (Krahn, Derwing, Mulder, & Wilkinson, 2000, Egan & Tomlinson, 2002). Even if they are able to get their previous studies recognized, asylum seekers do not have the right to higher education in Finland.

While, according to the European Migration Network, an initial skills test is administered to immigrants which includes an examination of skills, this test only applies to those who have

received a decision on their asylum application (European Migration Network, 2015, 4). The Finnish government admits that while it does have some data concerning the level of education of the people in reception centers, the data is sparse and only pertains to certain municipalities (Government Integration Programme 2016-2019, 42). The fact that little is known about the people housed in these reception centers is inefficient and costly, both to the individuals and to society as a whole.

A general lack of knowledge coupled with the massive influx of asylum seekers between 2015 and 2016 has resulted in political conflict in many refugee-receiving countries, including Finland. A 2018 report from the European Union's Fundamental Rights Agency singled out Finland as having the highest rate of racially motivated violence and harassment against people of African descent out of 12 European countries surveyed (Europäische Union & Agentur für Grundrechte, 2018, 13). This is a significant revelation as Finland has a reputation for tolerance and progressiveness, as well as having some of the lowest levels of foreign-born residents in western Europe ("Africans in Finland Face highest amount of discrimination in EU", 2018). There has been a notable rise in tensions after recent incidents in Northern Finland at the end of last year, which has since sparked heated public debate.

In December of 2018, news broke that nine men, all of whom were either refugees or asylum seekers, were implicated in the aggravated rape and sexual assault of a Finnish minor ("Finland populists eye election upset as an anti-immigrant feeling rises," 2019). Currently, police in the region have 10 open cases involving "men of foreign background" implicated in sex crimes against a minor ("Yet another suspected sexual abuse case in Oulu," 2019). This has prompted political parties on both sides to call for tougher measures on immigrants who commit crimes. These heavily publicized incidents spread outrage throughout Finland and may be one factor, which propelled the far-right nationalist Finns' Party to second place in the 2019 Parliamentary Elections ("Here Are the Results of Finland's 2019 Parliamentary Election - Tough Government Negotiations Ahead," 2019). Successful integration can help curb rising tensions and may even aid in identifying potential threats early on, thereby preventing incidents like the ones described. It can also help to unleash the full economic potential of the diverse range of skills among accepted refugees who are simply trying to start a new life for themselves. The following section will expand on the employment of asylum seekers in Finland.

2.3.2 Employment

Despite measures designed to restrict waiting times for asylum applications to six months, the legislative process dictates that asylum seekers have the right to appeal this decision up to three times. This means that even if the process takes the minimum possible time, an individual could reside in Finland for 18 months before they receive a final decision. A number of people who arrived during the boom in 2015-2016 are still awaiting decisions, as a result of a bureaucratic backlog. During the waiting period, asylum seekers find themselves in legal and social limbo where their lives are essentially put on hold, operating under a constant threat of deportation in the case that their asylum application is denied (Hainmueller, Hangartner, & Lawrence, 2016, 1). This idle waiting period can have dire consequences. One study in the UK found that “one additional year of waiting reduces the subsequent employment rate by 4 to 5 percentage points, a 16 to 23 percent drop compared to the average rate” (ibid). Studies have also suggested that participation in an occupation can help refugees and asylum seekers deal with residual psychological trauma (Burchett & Matheson, 2010, 85). This supports Finland’s policy of allowing asylum seekers to work. However, recent legislative changes have made it more difficult for asylum seekers in Finland to both find and retain work.

There appears to be a disconnect between recent policy changes and previous governmental reports. In 2016, the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities emphasized that the Finnish state should invest more in the services for beneficiaries of international protection, especially in the first years of their resettlement (Local and Regional Government in Finland, 2016, 3). The report also recognizes that “the most important means of integrating adult immigrants is integration training implemented as labor market adult education” (ibid, 9). The Association recommends that integration training and employment services be flexibly provided in localities in which the immigrants are settled (ibid). They go on to say that lack of integration training provided as labor market adult education has resulted in immigrants seeking out self-motivated studies that actually incur higher costs for local authorities. The Association asserts that “immigrants should not be referred to seek self-motivated studies for the reason only that the employment and economic administration lacks appropriations for integration training provided as labor market adult education” (ibid, 9).

Although the report is referring to people who have received refugee status, enhanced services for those awaiting a decision could help smooth the transition. The report also advocates for

strengthening the role of non-governmental organizations and voluntary networks in a coordinated manner, as these services can complement the services provided by public authorities (ibid, 10). A report released by the Ministry of the Interior acknowledges that foreign nationals have a higher unemployment rate than native Finns (Ministry of the Interior, 2018, 15). The report explains that early contacts with the world of work supports migrants' employment and that improved integration measures have been proven to have a positive impact on employment (ibid).

The Center for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (ELY Keskus) is responsible for the regional implementation and development of tasks handed down by the central government. In total, there are 15 ELY Centers, each tasked with promoting regional competitiveness, well-being and sustainable development including curbing climate change ("Etusivu - ELY-keskus," 2013). These Centers have three main areas of responsibility: business and industry, labor force, competence, and cultural activities; transport and infrastructure; and environment and natural resources. Centers for Economic Development, Transport, and the Environment, "supervise and steer the activities of the Employment and Economic Development Offices (TE-palvelut)" (ibid, 2013). TE Offices offer services to the unemployed, those who are currently working or entering working life as well as employers ("Employment and Economic Development Office: About | LinkedIn," 2018). However, a document released through the TE Office's website unequivocally states, "Asylum seekers cannot register as TE-Office customers until they have a valid residence permit in Finland" (*Asylum seekers right to Employment and Economic Development Office (TE Office) services*, n.d.). This means that only refugees are entitled to the services provided by the TE Office. Although, even with the help of the TE-Office it is still difficult for refugees to find work. Recently, some TE Offices have begun to partner with third sector actors, like Startup Refugees, in order to better meet the needs of its refugee clients.

There is, as of yet, no data available on employment statistics since the Refugee Crisis of 2015. However, there is significant data up until that point. The previous section on asylum policy in Finland broke down the demographic makeup of the asylum seekers who submitted their applications between July 2015 and March 2016. It was established that the largest number of applications came from Iraqi men between the ages of 18-34. Therefore, it may be relevant to explore how previous migrants from Iraq have fared in the Finnish labor market. *Figure 2* compares the unemployment rate of six groups of foreign nationals to that of native

Finns between the years 2000-2015. As the chart shows, Iraqis have historically had the highest rate of unemployment of any of the migrants surveyed. This does not bode well, given the high number of incoming refugees from Iraq. As of April 2019, Iraqis rank second, behind the Russian Federation, in the volume of applications with a total of 46,213 asylum applications since 2015 (“Tilastot — Maahanmuuttovirasto,” 2019). Of this number 22.1% or 19,799 have received a positive decision on their asylum application (ibid).

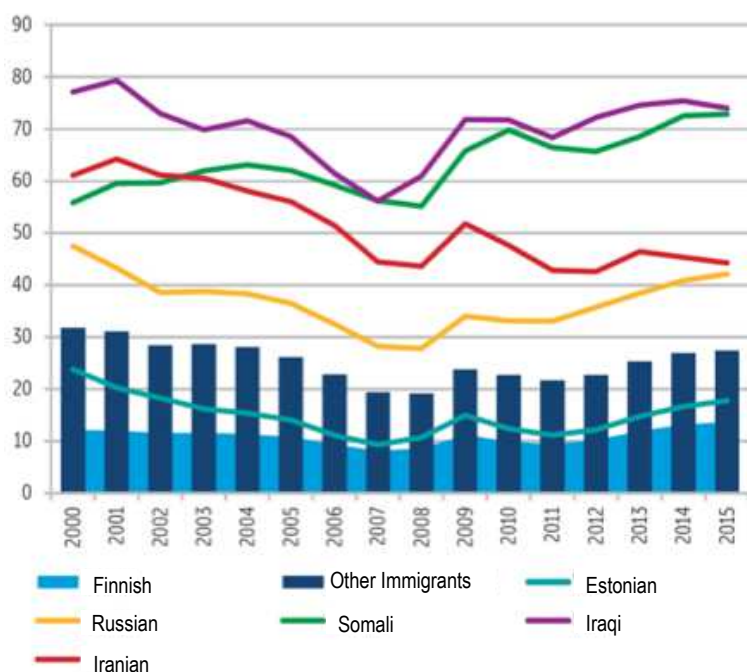


Figure 2 — Unemployment rate of nationals of Iraq and comparison countries between the years 2000-2015. (Lyytinen & Heikkilä, 2019, 331)

The integration of all immigrants, regardless of their country of origin, will be a challenge for years to come. There is a mounting body of evidence asserting that early contact with the labor market improves labor market outcomes overall. This sort of labor market specific education would be beneficial even to those who will not remain in Finland. Lack of support from the government in this endeavor has led to a burst of activity from third-sector actors. The following section will provide an in-depth look into one such organization, Startup Refugees.

2.4 Startup Refugees

Startup Refugees is a non-profit voluntary network, founded in 2015, by Finnish television personalities Riku Rantala and Tunna Milonoff. The organization was created to support the

employment and entrepreneurship aspirations of asylum seekers and refugees in Finland. The network is comprised of over 500 different actors including public-sector bodies, companies of various sizes, third sector actors, educational institutions, media houses, parishes, startup communities, research institutes, as well as private individuals. Startup Refugees (SUR) offers work, educational opportunities, professional connections, funding, mentoring, support in the development of skills, and consultant services to both immigrants and the companies that hire them.

2.4.1 Background

SUR distinguished itself as the first organization of any kind to go into the reception centers and gather data about the people living there. In order to do this, they began organizing match clinics (*osaamiskartoituksia*). In the first six months of operation SUR, with the help of a number of volunteers from its network, gathered an extensive amount of data from asylum seekers and refugees living in Finland. They collected this data in a set of web forms, which they would then manually input into various Excel spreadsheets. However, this technical solution quickly became insufficient and the network realized it needed a better tool to make their matching work more streamlined. The organization needed a proper profile database and search engine in order to help volunteers match qualified job-seekers with employment opportunities in Finland. There was also a recognition that this system needed to be highly secure as this data is highly sensitive. The organization along with a group of students from Haaga Heilia began to develop a system to manage this data in the spring of 2017 (*“Match made in Startup Refugees,”* 2018). Eventually, Finnish digital engineering and consultancy company Futurice took over and improved upon the students’ work as part of its corporate social responsibility program. The first version of Match, with most of its core functionality, went live in the spring of 2018 (*ibid*). As of spring 2019, SUR had received sufficient project funding to begin to pay for Futurice’s services, at a discounted price, and plans to roll-out Match 2.0 in September of 2019.

2.4.2 Funding

The continuity of SUR is largely dependent on public grants. The organization also receives funding from a number of private backers and has also received money from different EU initiatives. The majority of the funding SUR receives is project-based, meaning that it must

abide by the funder's specifications about how the money can be spent. It also means the organization needs to continually develop new initiatives. However, project funding needs to provide for new innovations while also covering the cost of existing operations: match clinics, contacting employers, managing existing relations with companies and employees, workshops and skills training, events, transportation, utilities. SUR's core functions cannot be included in project-based funding, but as a non-profit organization is unable to sell these services.

2.4.3 Structure and Purpose

The organizational structure of Startup Refugees in its current form is depicted in *Figure 3*. Startup Refugees is presently managed by Phoenix Ry, a non-profit incubator, which connects Finnish companies with other actors to solve the social challenges of volunteering (*"Non-profit hautomo Phoenix,"* 2019). Also, under the Phoenix umbrella are various initiatives, some of which are pictured below. Although, one of them has been crossed out, as it is unclear whether or not it is currently operational. Phoenix was born out of the network built by Startup Refugees and attempts to extend the network's target market to include other areas of social responsibility. The aim of this non-profit organization is reportedly to extend the model of participatory social responsibility and team building that emerged from the Startup Refugee network in order to enable a new kind of effective civil activism and social influence (ibid). The SUR model has sparked interest throughout Europe and in the coming months, the organization's business program will be trialed in three European cities: Barcelona, Berlin, and Milan. These would be autonomous bodies under the SUR brand.

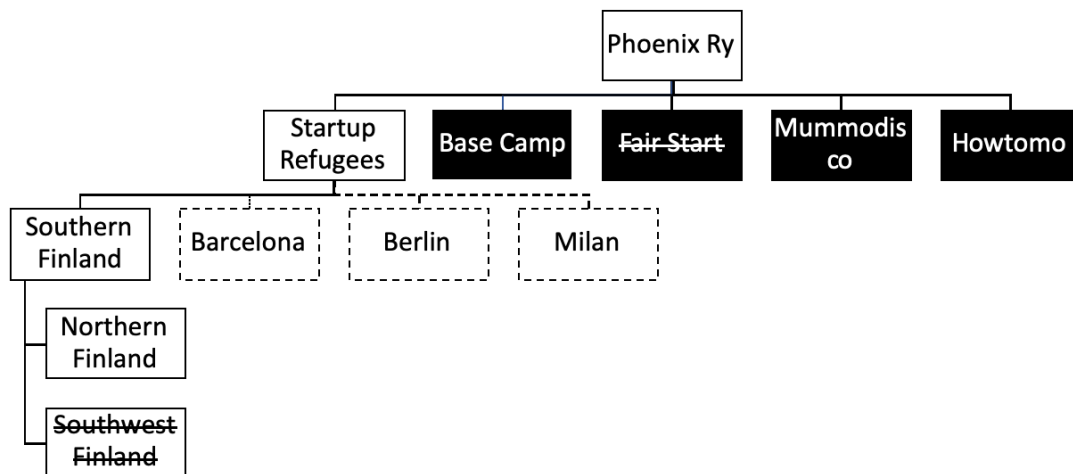


Figure 3: Startup Refugees Organizational Chart

Up until Spring of 2019, Startup Refugees had three branches working somewhat independently. The Southern branch of SUR opened in 2015 in response to the needs of its target market. This branch is now effectively the organizational headquarters, being the most established branch with the widest network. In 2017, the organization established its Northern branch, which originally was only able to afford one part-time employee. In 2018 SUR, in partnership with a regional body, opened the Southwestern branch although this branch has since been disbanded. The branch experienced a slight conflict of interest as the only employee was simultaneously contracted by SUR and another regional body. This complication proved to be detrimental to the branch and by May of 2019, the Southwestern branch had been dissolved. The Northern branch has been more successful, expanding rapidly since its inception. The following section will introduce the organization's two main functions, the Employment Program and the Business Program.

2.4.4 Programs

SUR has two main programs, the Employment Program, and the Business Program. The Employment Program is an ongoing initiative, which helps secure employment for asylum seekers and/or refugees at existing Finnish companies. In order to accomplish this goal, the organization is constantly attempting to utilize and grow its network to help people find jobs. This can involve anything from cold-calling new companies and managing existing relationships to

making sure that the employees are integrating well into their new work environment and have all the necessary documents.

Figure 4 provides a visual representation of the typical employment process of SUR. The first step is to add an individual to the database through a Match Clinic. After this, there are usually two ways one can proceed; either the person immediately begins filling out online job applications with a SUR representative or the person is encouraged to participate in a SUR sponsored workshop or training initiative. In the next phase, the individual would, ideally, be invited for a job interview. In the North, the person may receive support in the form of written or electronic material concerning what to expect in a job interview, and there may also be an opportunity for a mock job interview. However, it was brought to my attention that in the Southern branch a SUR employee normally accompanies the candidate(s) to the interview. This is just one concrete example of some of the differences, which may exist between branches. If the person makes it past the interview phase they would then start work on a trial basis. This phase is customarily no longer than three weeks, during which time the individual receives a reduced salary. After the trial period, the employer and employee agree to either extend or terminate the contract. Although this process may vary slightly depending on the individual and the company this is standard practice. SUR is involved throughout the process and also provides support in case the job requires specific licenses or permits.

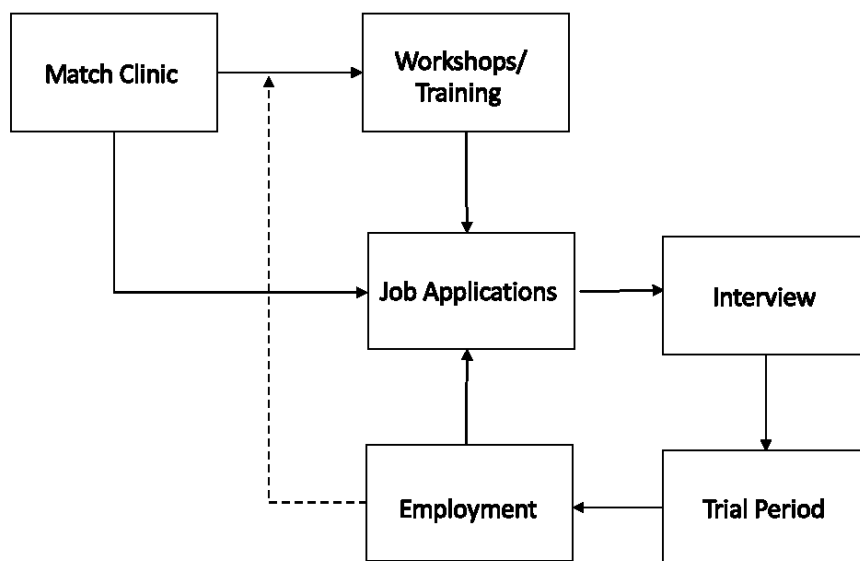


Figure 4 Startup Refugee Employment Process

The second initiative is the Startup Refugee Business Program. This program runs in sessions at least twice a year and is designed to help the more entrepreneurial-minded asylum seekers/refugees gain the knowledge they need to start a business in Finland. The program includes workshops, mentoring sessions, company visits, and various specialized support for program participants. The goal is primarily educationally based, providing students with the knowledge and tools they need to start a business. The next section will provide additional information on the SUR Northern branch, which is the focus of this thesis.

2.4.5 Northern Finland

I became acquainted with Startup Refugees three months after it established its Northern branch and have since followed the progression of the organization. The data compiled here was gathered between November 2017 and June of 2019. This time proved to be a period of growth and expansion for the organization. When the researcher first became involved with the Northern branch, they had one person on staff working part-time. By the spring of 2017, they had added one unpaid intern who was eventually retained on staff full-time and then promoted to the head of the Business Program. Currently, the branch has four to five people on staff, three full time and two part-time employees. The organization has grown organically, in response to the need they serve. The size and scale of the services provided by this branch have increased dramatically over its two years of operation, however, its purpose remains the same. Originally, Startup Refugees focused solely on asylum seekers and refugees, however, as the organization has continued to grow there have been talks to expanding operations to other immigrant groups in the region. This topic will be explored in the Analysis chapter of this paper. The next chapter will explore the theoretical framework behind this research.

3 Theoretical Framework

This chapter will introduce and describe the theoretical framework guiding this research. It will explicitly state the author's theoretical assumptions allowing the reader to critically evaluate them. This research attempts to isolate the influence of one NGO on the integration of asylum seekers into the Finnish labor market. The main theory employed to explain the phenomenon in question is that of Social Capital Theory supported, in part, by Intergroup Contact Theory. This chapter will describe these social theories and their application in previous research regarding employment. The purpose of this is to better illuminate for the reader how these theories will be applied to the case of the employment of asylum seekers and refugees in Northern Finland.

3.1 Social Capital Theory

The research themes and context of this paper are defined by a new era of globalization, which is having a profound impact on both the political and economic landscape in Finland. The incorporation of immigrants into their host societies is one of the fundamental challenges of the modern world (Lancee, 2012, 13). The Finnish government is increasingly aware of the perceived benefits and threats this poses to modern society. The integration of migrants in terms of employment, income and occupational status is a major concern that has appeared in a number of Finnish and EU documents (European Migration Network, 2015; European Migration Network, 2017; Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2016; Ministry of the Interior, 2018). There is also, a mounting body of evidence suggesting that interethnic relations can be associated with better labor market outcomes, making it a viable political and economic strategy (Burchett & Matheson, 2010; European Migration Network, 2017; Immigration Department, 2018; Lance, 2012; Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2016; Ministry of the Interior, 2018; Sarvimäki, 2017). This paper investigates social capital from a social network perspective, employing research from a variety of sources to help examine its application to the case of SUR. This section explores both the concept of social capital and its influence on the labor market.

In order to properly assess the influence of social capital in the work of Startup Refugees, it is important to first clarify the term. One of the first to define the concept of social capital was French scholar Pierre Bourdieu, who described it as:

The aggregate of the actual and potential resources which are linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a ‘credential’ which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word (1986, 248).

Bourdieu (ibid, 249) goes on to say, that the volume of an individual’s social capital is dependent on the size of the network of connections that can be effectively mobilized and on the volume of capital possessed by each of the individuals in the network. In the years to follow, the term has been applied to a number of sociological concepts. As a result, it has received some criticism for being conceptually ambiguous with authors assigning different meanings to it based on their needs (Durlauf, 1999). One reason that social capital is so difficult to define is that it is not a single entity, but a variety of different entities having two shared characteristics: they each consist of some aspect of social structure and they facilitate a particular action for individuals within the structure (Coleman, 1990, 302).

Intellectually, social capital has been used as a counterpoint theory to human capital theory for scholars who aim to capture elements or resources embedded in social structures or networks (Lin, 2001). Physical capital (tools, machines, materials) is wholly tangible, being embodied in the physical world; human capital is less tangible in that it exists in the form of skills and knowledge possessed by an individual; social capital is even more abstract as it is embodied in the relationships among people (Coleman, 1990, 304). Although intangible, social capital can facilitate productive activity. For example, the common organizational practice of hiring new workers via employee referrals (Fernandez & Castilla, 2001). This is of particular significance when examining the link between having social relations and finding a job. Social capital can also be applied to the labor market outcomes of immigrants, as social capital can provide them access to host country-specific human capital and job opportunities.

Putnam identifies social capital as a fundamental facet of social life – networks, norms, and trust – which enables members of a particular group to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives (Putnam, 2000). Recent theorists have distinguished between *bonding* and *bridging* social capital (Lancee, 2012; Putnam, 2000; Zetter et al., 2006). Essentially, bonding refers to connections within a given group, while bridging refers to between-group connections. A bridging tie spans a structural hole or a gap in the network. Hence, a bridging tie connects an individual with people who were not previously their network (Lancee, 2012, 62).

Bridging social capital is seen as being particularly useful for immigrants, as building bridges to the native population is an effective strategy to gain access to host country-specific resources and circumvent discrimination (ibid, 15).

Lancee (2012, 18) also distinguishes between cognitive and structural social capital. The structural component refers to the extent and intensity of associational links or activity in a network or the 'wires'. While, structural social capital consists of both the collection of ties characterized by the relation between the connected entities; and the possible institutional embeddedness of these ties, which determines how likely it is that resources will be exchanged (ibid). He refers to the cognitive components as the 'nodes' in the network or the degree of trust, which contributes to the exchange of resources.

Erickson (2001, 127), argues that network variety, or the breadth of people one knows, is a form of social capital valuable to both employers and employees in the hiring process. Erickson describes the hiring process as a dual process matching the supply side (employees) with the demand side (employers). She goes on to say that social capital is also dual, asserting that the reason employers like employees with social capital is because employers can convert this into organizational capital (ibid). This is of particular significance when examining the link between having social relations and finding a job. Although, a new dimension is added when one considers the influence of NGOs, like Startup Refugees, who facilitate such matches.

There is a growing consensus that non-government organizations (NGOs) play a significant role in delivering welfare services to the public (Chenhall, Hall, & Smith, 2010). In order to accomplish this, NGOs rely on developing social connections to match those in need with service providers and suppliers of welfare funding (ibid, 737). In order to provide welfare services, NGOs need to attract capital to fund operations. However, this can be the cause of inherent tension for NGOs struggling to balance the desire to maintain their humanitarian ideals with the need to attract economic capital (ibid, 738).

There is a body of social capital research, which focuses on the mechanisms that work to strengthen the integration of agents to effect coordinated actions and examines how social capital can create social cohesion and sustain the stable development of society (Coleman, 1990; Putnam 2000). This string of research can aid in the understanding of how NGOs leverage social capital to deliver effective welfare services, provide advantages to organizations,

and to individuals (Chenhall, Hall, & Smith, 2010, 738). Using the concept of structural bridging, one can begin to analyze networks of social ties and relational bonding to explore how individuals are predisposed towards mutually beneficial collective action (ibid).

This idea is supported by a Swedish study, which explored the link between participation in voluntary associations and political activity (Teorell, 2003). The study cites empirical evidence, which has shown strong support for connections between civic skills incubated by voluntary organizations and political participation in the community (ibid, 50). In this case, being connected to a voluntary association adds to one's social capital, tying an individual to an existing network of relationships. Teorell asserts that these connections can be used for many purposes, including the development of civic skills (ibid, 51). Following this line of thinking it could also be argued that these connections may also aid in the development of other types of skills. Particularly, in the development of high demand labor market skills.

Social Capital Theory is not without its critics, but its existence is well documented in social science. Dissention comes from how social capital is leveraged by society. Opponents of Social Capital Theory contend tight intragroup bonds restrict the best jobs to members of the in-group "thus requiring the intervention of impersonal public agencies to break up the holds of these bonds and open up opportunities for others" (Portes, 2014, 18407). This is a valid argument, but one could submit that should the intervention be executed by a more personal third-sector agency, with specific knowledge of the individual and the company it may be more effective. Portes is deeply concerned with these impersonal bodies. He goes on to say that impersonal regulatory institutions, universal norms, and self-reliance are now key elements of society; and that modern economies "can scarcely operate without such elements" (2014, 18408). However, initiatives like the UN Sustainable Development Goals are working towards ending antiquated practices that reproduce unsustainable norms and practices perpetuated by such impersonal agencies ("Background of the Sustainable Development Goals," 2019). It is in everyone's best interest to redefine the modern economy in order to ensure a better future for the planet.

3.2 Intergroup Contact Theory

It is hardly possible to overrate the value...of placing human beings in contact with persons dissimilar to themselves, and with modes of thought and action unlike those with which they are familiar... Such communication has always been, and is peculiarly in the present age, one of the primary sources of progress (Mill, 1846, volume 2, book 3, chapter 7, section 5, as cited in Woolcock, 2001, 65).

Gordon Allport's Intergroup Contact Theory has been widely hailed as one of the most influential theories in social psychology (Abrams, 2017; Brown & Gonzales, 2017; Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Dovidio, Glick, & Rudman, 2005; Pettigrew & Troop, 2005). After over sixty years Allport's, *The Nature of Prejudice* (1954), remains one of the most cited books on the topic of prejudice. The scope and endurance of its influence has been described as "nothing short of remarkable" (Dovidio, Glick, & Rudman, 2005, 1). In an increasingly interconnected world, colored by incidents of international conflict, a rise in nationalism, and increasingly hostile immigration receptions experienced by refugees and asylum seekers (Brown & Hewstone, 2005, 256). The task of ameliorating complex global intergroup relationships requires a coordinated effort. Allport admits that merely assembling people "without regard for race, color, religion, or national origin" will not destroy stereotypes or create friendly feelings (Allport, 1954, 261). He maintains that the case is not so simple and provides four key conditions that yield positive effects of intergroup contact: equal group status within the given situation; common goals; intergroup cooperation; and support from authorities, law, or custom (Pettigrew, 1998, 66).

The first condition asserts that equal group status is essential to ensuring a positive intergroup experience. Allport describes accumulating evidence, which suggests that differential status in occupation is an active factor in creating and maintaining prejudice (Allport, 1954, 274). He goes on to say that distributing members of the out-group both at the bottom of the occupational ladder and in the higher echelons can help forestall discrimination (ibid). The next caveat to prejudice reduction through contact is the existence of a common goal (Pettigrew, 1998, 66). This could be applied to multiracial sports teams or even to the successful completion of work tasks by a heterogeneous workgroup. The next stipulation is that of intergroup

cooperation. Allport stresses that the contact must reach below the surface and that only contact that leads people to do things together is effective (Allport, 1954, 276). Allport (*ibid*, 278), then discusses goodwill contacts. He refers to the period after the race riots in America in 1943, when official commissions were created to combat prejudice. These committees were composed of influential members of the community, including representatives of leading minority groups in the region. He explains that these committees were typically ineffective as the members were too busy and untrained in how to affect change. He also claims that other related agencies and civilian led organizations also failed due to a lack of clear objectives and concrete goals (*ibid*). The final condition for positive intergroup relations is support from institutions or the state. This, Allport claims, greatly enhances the impact of contact. Benediction by the state establishes norms of acceptance and guidelines for how members of different groups should behave around each other (Brown & Hewstone, 2005, 265).

According to Brown and Gonzalez (2017, 34), contact reduces prejudice because it reduces feelings of intergroup anxiety and perceived threat while increasing knowledge and empathy towards outgroup members. Brown and Hewstone (2005, 256) concur with Allport that frequent and in-depth contact with an out-group may help decrease intergroup anxiety and increase intergroup trust through the experience of positive contact. The authors cite numerous longitudinal studies, which support the idea that contact, under the right conditions can be advantageous in making intergroup behaviors and attitudes more positive (*ibid*, 261).

Recent heavily publicized racially charged incidents have ignited tension throughout Finland. This has given rise to fierce nationalism and has brought immigration issues to the forefront of Finnish politics. There is a paradoxical relationship between Finland's need for immigrants and its rising fear of them. The incidents in the North of Finland involving a group of asylum seekers has caused this tension to metastasize. The government's response to these incidents only helps to sow fear by placing tighter restrictions on asylum seekers, further isolating them from the general public. The efficient and effective integration of asylum seekers should work to prevent these types of incidents from happening, or at the very least help identify potential perpetrators early on in the asylum process. This research examines how one NGO is working to combat racial prejudice through inclusion and employment. This study analyzes the influence of work on the integration of asylum seekers via the lens of Social Capital Theory and Intergroup Contact Theory. The following chapter will describe in detail the methodological process employed in this research.

4 Methodology

This section will introduce the design and implementation of the research and discuss the methods employed in the creation of this project in order to illuminate for the reader how this thesis has been developed. The methodological process employed consisted of six distinct phases: data collection, categorization and phenomenological reduction of recurrent issues, clustering units of meaning, summarizing and validating, followed by identifying and summarizing final themes (Flick, 2014, 301).

4.1 Methodological Approach and Research Design

The methodology employed in the design of this research is that of a case study. In line with this qualitative approach, the investigator explored a bounded system, in this case, the organization Startup Refugees, over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (Creswell, 2007, 73). This approach is well established in social science and was chosen based on its practical application to the chosen topic. This is an exploratory study investigating a phenomenon characterized by a lack of detailed preliminary research. Therefore, the research questions developed over time as the information was gathered and processed (Encyclopedia of Case Studies, 2010, 372). The study took place over a period of fifteen months, approximately five months after the opening of Startup Refugee's Northern branch.

This research is exploratory in nature and focuses on uncovering the particularities of Startup Refugees impact on the labor market in Northern Finland. The aforementioned gap in research pertaining to asylum seekers and refugees from various stakeholder groups supports the use of exploratory case study to investigate the given phenomenon. This research was guided by my interest in the case itself rather than extending theory or generalizing across cases, as such this case would be best described as an instrumental case study (Encyclopedia of Case Studies, 2010, 499). The research design combines an extensive collection of primary and secondary data sources. In this endeavor, the author embraces the ontological assumption that there exist multiple realities. Therefore, in the design of this study, the author felt it important to include the varying perspectives of multiple groups of relevant stakeholders. As such, the primary data of this thesis is derived from nine semi-structured interviews with three different stake-

holder groups, as well as descriptions of the author's own work in the field including information uncovered while I was contracted by the organization. Secondary data sources include a diverse variety of documentation including: laws, policy documents, newspaper sources, online material, relevant scientific literature, and material provided by the organization Startup Refugees. I used an iterative process of trying to identify repeated information or issues that were then developed into key themes, which were then divided in to headings and subheadings.

4.2 Data Collection and Analysis

4.2.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

The primary data of this study is derived from nine semi-structured interviews from three stakeholder groups. *Table 1* provides a visual representation of these groups. The subjects have been identified using both letters and numbers. The numbers represent the numerical order in which the interviews took place, each participant is also identified by two different sets of letters. The first letter combination identifies the participant as either an asylum seeker (AS), an employer (E), or a Startup Refugee employee (SR), respectively. The second letter combination pertains strictly to the asylum seeker employer relationship. Asylum seekers and employers marked with the same letter are related. Using this system, it is possible to deduce that AS1C is an asylum seeker, was the first person interviewed, and works at the same company as AS2C and E7C. Additionally, the table has been color coordinated with boxes of the same color indicating a relationship between the participants. The interview guide for each stakeholder group can be found in Appendix 3.

Table 1: Participant Codes

Asylum Seeker	Employer	Startup Refugee Employee
AS1C	E4B	SR6
AS2C	E5A	SR8
AS4A	E7C	SR9

Interviews were taken over the course of nine months, with the first interview taking place on the 14th of May 2018 and the final interview conducted on the 19th of February 2019. Interviews were carried out by agreement either at the person's home, in a public space, at a workplace, or at the SUR office. Locations were chosen based on feasibility and the interviewees' preference. All nine interviews were recorded with the participants' consent. The recorded material was then transcribed for analysis. Interview times varied from half-an-hour to one hour. Participants were first approached by a SUR employee and asked if they would be willing to participate in a study. The participants were then contacted by the author and informed of the nature of the research and their rights as participants.

Asylum Seekers

The first stakeholder group interviewed were asylum seekers. Interviews were conducted with three asylum seekers who have been employed in the region. Participants were selected based on four criteria: their involvement with the organization SUR, the fact that they had been employed at a Finnish company for a period greater than or equal to two months, their willingness to participate, and their ability to speak English. All subjects were adult males from Iraq between the ages of 18-34. Two of the participants were working at the same company, while the third was working at a company in a different municipality. The participants' English language skills varied greatly, with subject AS1C and AS2C both expressing that their current English level was inferior to their Finnish level. This will be explored in greater detail in the Limitations section of this document.

Employers

This group is comprised of hiring managers and/or supervisors directly responsible for an asylum seeker. Two of the interviews included two different managers from the same company. In these interviews, one or both of the persons interviewed did not speak English. Therefore, a translator was present who provided a real-time translation of the conversation. These conversations were recorded and cross-checked by another translator in order to check for inconsistencies in the translation. This group includes managers from three different companies in three different municipalities. The companies were all in the manufacturing sector but worked in different fields.

Startup Refugee Employees

When the study began SUR had one part-time employee on staff. As the research developed, the author witnessed the number grow to three full-time employees, with three different rotations of student trainees, and a trail based part-time employee. Additionally, the author herself was hired for a period of two months to aid in the development of the organizations Business Program. Originally, the plan was to interview just the Regional Director of the organization. However, as the organization grew the author decided that, for the purpose of this research, it was important to include data from all three full-time employees. The interview questions (see Appendix 3) for the regional manager varied slightly from those used for the other two employees. This was due to the fact that the interview with SR6 took place a full six months prior to the interviews with SR8 and SR9. The specific roles of each of the employees will be discussed in detail in the Results chapter of this study.

4.2.2 Field Work

In addition to the interviews described in the previous section, I also gained knowledge through active participation in the organization's initiatives over the course of the study. These activities were varied in nature and evolved over time as the researcher became more familiar with the organization and its employees. In March of 2019, I became temporarily employed by the organization in order to aid in the completion of the regions first Business Program. My salary was paid through project-based funding (AIKO), supplied by the Regional Council of the area. The contract was for a period of two months, during which time I was provided

access to additional sources of information. I was also involved in informal interactions with employees during breaks and leisure time where I was a party to off-the-record nuances and personal sentiments about ongoing changes in the organization. This allowed me to form an informed opinion about the work environment. However, due to the sensitive nature of SUR's work with clients and ethics related to confidentiality, the discussion here will be limited to those who expressly consented to being included in the study. During my time as an employee, I encountered work-in-action problems, emergencies, and crises. Observation of these events and discussions with the people involved after the fact helped me to gain a better understanding of the working culture within the organization.

Data Collections

As described in the definition of terms section, match clinics are one of the main functions of the SUR organization. Typically, one or more data collections are organized per month. These clinics sometimes involve transporting volunteers to reception centers located in smaller municipalities in the surrounding area, often a few hours drive from the branch headquarters. Throughout the course of this study, I attended match clinics in four municipalities. The amount of time it takes to fill out the online form varies from person to person depending on their skills and experience. Times ranged from 30 minutes to two hours per person. Typically, there were approximately three to six volunteers present at each clinic. The number of participants varied drastically as participation was optional and the process depended heavily on the language skills of the people involved. Additionally, job seekers would often come into the SUR office for individual appointments to fill out the online form with one of the SUR employees or volunteers. The mother tongues of the asylum seekers I observed were: Arabic, Russian, Dari, French, Ukrainian, and Spanish. Languages are listed based on the frequency observed, with Arabic being the most frequently observed and Spanish being the least. In the Spring of 2019, my colleagues and I observed a sharp increase in the number of Russian speaking asylum seekers in the local reception center. Volunteers with knowledge of any of the languages listed were actively pursued by the network.

Work Tank

Over the course of the study, SUR organized two separate “Work Tank” events. The first was trialed in the spring of 2018. It was then renewed in the spring of 2019, in partnership with another related third-sector organization. The event was designed to bring together companies and job seekers for a few hours of intense interviewing. The job seekers were vetted before the event to ensure that the companies were provided quality candidates who would both meet the companies needs and were likely to accept the job if offered.

In the Spring of 2019, seven companies participated in the event, sending representatives to interview 45 candidates put forth by SUR. The job seekers were provided a skills workshop one day prior to the event, in order to help them prepare for the interviews. The workshop was held at the Work and Economic Development Office (Työ- Ja elinkeinotoimisto) but the content was developed by Startup Refugees. There were three sessions held simultaneously in Finnish, English, and Arabic. The sessions opened with an overview of working life in Finland including information concerning: employee rights and duties, employer rights and duties, employment contracts, tax cards, salary, Finnish work culture, equality in the workplace, holidays, religion in the workplace, and ending a contract. The next portion of the workshop went through what to expect in a job interview. This included common questions as well as tips on how to present oneself in an interview. Participants then engaged in a group mock job interview where they practiced answering questions and were coached on how to respond effectively. After the session, the material was provided via email to each of the attendees upon request.

The following day interviews were held in a community center owned by the city, which had donated the space for the day. In the morning, everyone gathered for a brief introduction then disbursed. Individuals were given a specific time and told that they were free to leave and come back. Problems arose as some interviews took more or less time depending, affecting the schedule. Some companies offered the option for the interview to be held in Finnish or English, depending on the position. However, one company retroactively said they would only hire applicants with Finnish language skills. Although the organization received positive feedback from the employers who participated, in the end, the event did not result in any new hires.

Business Program

In March of 2019, I was hired by Startup Refugees to work part-time on the Region's first Business Program. The program was funded by a regional development activity initiated by Prime Minister Sipilä's government, the Alueellisten innovaatioiden ja kokeilujen käynnistäminen (AIKO). The AIKO project was funded by the Ministry of Employment and the Economy, who then allocated funds to specific regional councils. The regional council is then ultimately responsible for which projects get funding. In order to be eligible for funding, an individual or organization must apply and then present to the council. Projects that receive funding are then subject to various requirements or constraints as a stipulation.

The Startup Refugee Business Program content was derived from an existing program developed by the Southern office ("Business Program", 2019). The objective of the program is to support the entrepreneurial aspirations of immigrants in Finland. The funding for the program I was involved in was provided through AIKO by the Regional Council for the purpose of stimulating growth and development in a rural area, which had experienced a high amount of outward migration. Therefore, the idea was to help bolster the economy of the municipality by encouraging the entrepreneurial ambitions of asylum seekers/refugees living in the area.

The program began with an informational session held in the municipality, after which interested parties were instructed to apply online. Approximately twelve people applied and of those ten were selected. The program did struggle with retention, however, as two participants dropped out and a few of the others attendance was inconsistent. The program ran for three months and was comprised of workshops, company visits, coaching, and mentoring sessions. Also included in the program was a closing event where participants competed for two small prizes by pitching their business ideas. Additionally, at the end of the program, there were to be a number of pop-up events organized, where participants would be able to trial their business ideas. The feedback from the participants was generally positive, however, it may not have met the goal of encouraging people to stay in the rural area. This topic will be explored in more detail in the following section.

5 Results

Data analysis involves identifying the devices that participants use to legitimate, justify, and explain their purposes and practices (Egan & Tomlinson, 2002, 1028). The extracts selected for discussion here have been chosen as representative accounts that inform the main themes of this research. The exploratory case study method allows for a degree of flexibility and adaptability when conducting research (Encyclopedia of Case Study Research, 2010, 372). In practice, this allowed me the freedom to build my research questions over time as I became more familiar with the case. The use of multiple stakeholder accounts in this case allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the emerging phenomenon of asylum seeker and refugee employment in the region. The purpose of this research is to explain the meaning, nature, and challenges associated with the employment of asylum seekers and refugees in Northern Finland in order to use that knowledge to act in a more informed and effective way. This chapter will present a detailed account of how the organization, Startup Refugees, contributes to the integration of asylum seekers and the different challenges the organization and its stakeholders face in the integration process.

5.1 Establishing the Northern Branch

In order to fully understand the role of SUR in the integration process and its expansion in the region, it is first relevant to describe how the organization's Northern branch came into being. An endeavor that requires examining participant SR6 and her role in the organization in detail.

SR6 is an employee at the SUR Northern branch. Before starting work at SUR, she was employed at another organization helping immigrants with a residence permit integrate into society. The group of people was working with previously had been living in Finland for over five years. She also worked with newcomers who had been in Finland for less than three years and were still receiving integration services. It was at this other job that she first became exposed to asylum seekers and their delicate situation. She had been assigned to a new project designed to "activate" asylum seekers through various activities such as football, painting, or woodworking. She remembers being struck by the difference between the group of immigrants that she had been working with and these asylum seekers:

When I started working with asylum seekers I realized that these people have no human rights, basically, and the situation is very difficult, and by that point, it was 2016

and the catastrophic situation was here so, so I just felt that this was...somewhere that we are needed (SR6).

She goes on to describe a growing sense of dissatisfaction with her given task, both her own and on the part of the asylum seekers to who she was assigned. She felt these activities were not truly helping them and they reported feeling that they didn't have a voice in Finnish society:

They don't have rights and there's nothing they can really do in this society. They're not allowed to work, or they can't find work...or people just don't take them in. They have no connections with Finnish people. All this, and then I sort of accidentally started finding jobs for these people, because I know many entrepreneurs...and it just started there at that previous thing (SR6).

However, her previous employer informed her that this was not part of her job description and that she was not allowed to be doing this. SR6 described feeling frustrated, after being told to stop doing what she felt was really helping people. She said that around two months later she heard that SUR might be hiring a person to work in her region. She remembers being immediately interested, even though the job was only part-time, and she already had a "really good job" she felt that this was somewhere she could make a difference. She expressed an interest in the position before the summer, but summer came and went with no word, so she began working again in the fall. Then, after she had already started work at her other job, she received a phone call from the Southern branch asking if she was still interested in the position. So, she put in her two-week notice and began work at Startup Refugees.

Her previous work with immigrants and asylum seekers in the region had left her highly regarded with the area's immigrant community. In fact, her name came up in conversations with all of the asylum seekers interviewed, unsolicited. They felt she understood their situation and was working in their best interest:

SR6, she know[s] the Iraqi people better...and she [was] working with the Iraqi people and also when I tell her everything she *believed* that and... she tried to give the job to me...(ASC1).

Even without knowing her personally, she had gained a reputation for being a person that asylum seekers and refugees could trust. AS2C described meeting SR6 for the first time after having been recommended for a position at E7C's company, where his friend had already been employed:

Had you ever talked to her [SR6]?

AS2C: No, but my friends when I asked them about her they say, “this really so good woman!”

Really?

AS2C: Really, and when I saw that really she is!

AS2C: When this interview end they say you should wait one month or two months after that they sent a message...to SR6 and after that, I started this work.

Okay, and did you contact SR6 or did she contact you?

AS2C: She contacted me

So then did you go and sign the contract?

AS2C: Yes, also when I sign my contract she came and she was with me and really this I feel that thanks not enough to her.

Commissioning SR6 gave Startup Refugees access to her net social capital in the region. This decision would prove to be significant as she had connections not just with asylum seekers, but with local business owners as well. A prime example of this is the relationship between SR6 and E7C. The two had known each other before SR6 started work at SUR, therefore when E7C was looking for new employees he turned to her first:

Well, I got...let's say, a recommendation from my friend SR6 that...she [had] started...this work and she said that it if we have some places where we can take in trainees or workers and, at the same time, I had a project...where we needed...kind of hand-work and we needed new workers and their older education was not needed. So, we saw an opportunity to...take in these new guys. It was last year in June (E7C).

The trust between SR6 and E7C was what initiated contact, however, once the first asylum seeker she had recommended proved himself to be a viable employee that trust was extended to include people in his circle. The first employee E7C hired was not interviewed for this study, however, he did know AS1C and AS2C who were interviewed. Therefore, for the sake of simplicity, he will be referred to here as Mostafa. Mostafa was hired at the same time as another asylum seeker, an African man. E7C describes noticing the difference between these two men very quickly. He recounted that the “African guy” was not picking up what he should do. He postulated it could be attributed to insufficient language skills on the part of this man, regardless, they let the African man go but kept Mostafa on staff. Then when they needed more people E7C right away asked SR6, but he also asked Mostafa if he knew anyone who might be interested in the job.

I said to this Mostafa if he had friends, who would like to join, then it actually went so that this first guy, Mostafa, he introduced the next two guys who were really active

and good ones and then we just made the contracts with SR6 for them...I don't know if out of the next five ones if there was a couple of guys coming in as friends recommendation and maybe a couple of others were maybe Startup Refugee's for example, now the last three ones I ask SR6 to pick a few good guys for the interview and... maybe one of them nobody knew from before and then there was a roommate of one of our [current] workers, and we didn't know it before the interview! We found out that...two out of three already knew us quite well and knew the new guys working there...So, it makes things easy. They have worked with each other already (E7C).

So much of SUR work involves the underlying directive of trust. Trust between the asylum seekers and SUR employees, trust between the companies and SUR employees, trust between the employers and the employees. This trust is the driving force of the organization's results. The creation and maintenance of this trust sustain operations. Therefore, to have someone, like SR6, at the forefront of operations in the North gave SUR the social capital it needed to develop the region. Bourdieu would ascribe this success to the size of SR6's network of connections and the fact that she was able to effectively mobilize these connections in order to secure jobs for people.

Figure 5 provides a visual representation of the partially overlapping social networks of E7C, SR6 and Mostafa at the time of Mostafa's employment. This figure has been adapted from a similar figure by Bram Lancee (2012, 21). It is meant here to depict the network of connections between these individuals, belonging to different groups, and how when they connect the network becomes larger increasing the amount of available resources and thus the social capital of the individuals in the network. This is the basic principle behind the Startup Refugees network, extending the social capital of individuals for the benefit of society. It is also important that each of these individuals works to extend the network by encouraging others in their network to join thereby continuing the expansion of the network.

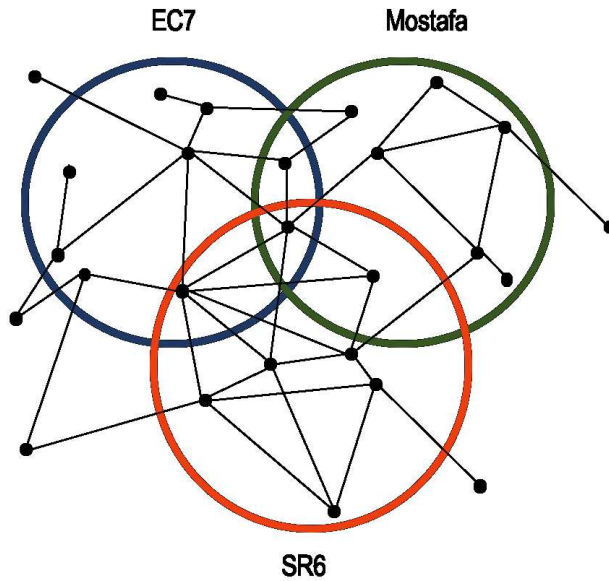


Figure 5 Partially overlapping Social Networks of E7C, SR6, and Mostafa

The ideal situation is when SUR already has the trust of an employer and the asylum seeker so they can bridge the gap and connect these individuals. Unfortunately, this is not always the case a situation that will be explored in greater detail in this chapter. Now that the reader has a better understanding of how Startup Refugees positioned itself in the region, the succeeding section will begin to explore its multidimensional role in the integration process.

5.2 Role in Integration

The basic job is to employ and that's the most important thing, always, and it should be a constant system working behind everything that new companies are coming in and old ones are taken care of, we call them we send them messages, "how is it going?" If something happens somewhere we always need to know about it and follow all the licenses, that everyone still has valid licenses, and work permits, and all that; and then, with the people that come in with high hopes, who you interview, fill in their work history, and you send them tons of messages every day and you want to answer them, because you want to give them the kindness that "I remember you" and "I haven't forgotten you"....we want to give equal opportunity, but if someone is really active and he shows it with his activeness that he really wants to work...it's good for us, to know if somebody is active that way...and when you're able to help somebody and

you give somebody a job you can be happy about it...the most effective time is maybe when somebody sits next to you when you start looking for places together (SR6).

As described in the above passage, the basic function of SUR is to employ, however, as this quote demonstrates, it may take a lot to accomplish this goal. This section will attempt to describe the role of Startup Refugees in the integration of asylum seekers and refugees into the labor market in Finland. In order to answer this question, I have identified two key activities of the SUR Northern branch. The first is that of an employment agency; and the second, as an educational service provider. The subsequent subsection will investigate Startup Refugees role as an employment agency

5.2.1 Employment Agency

As outlined in the section regarding Integration and Employment, asylum seekers are not entitled to integration services, unless they receive refugee status. Although, even those who do receive support from the Employment and Economic Development Offices (TE-Offices) have difficulty finding employment. This has created a demand for an entity that can fulfill the various needs of this unique group of people.

We are quick, compared to the TE-Office...and we are not bureaucratic...The TE-Office is good for courses...They organize really, really good courses for people who are out of a job...but work wise...I don't know how many people the TE-Office has actually helped find a job. I don't see that as their core activity anymore, ironically, but you know it's rare even for Finnish people that the TE Office has actually helped them to find work. They do all these...supportive activities...they will tell the person, "Oh, there is this course where they will teach you how to find a job yourself. I can put you on the course" or "Oh, there's this employer that has this job available online" but they don't actually...The TE-Office is not the body that contacts the employer and goes: "Hello I have a customer here who has done this, that, and the next thing", which is what we do. They don't recommend the customers to the employer. They are not like matching them. They just go, "Oh, there's a job and there's a customer. Apply for this job" that's it...like they...point them in a certain direction and go, "You should go there" and then the person goes "yes" or "no" (SR8).

Employment agencies are businesses that find employers or employees for those seeking them.

According to this definition, SUR plays the part of an employment agency, helping asylum seekers and refugees integrate through work. One of the network's main tasks is to match those who need workers with those looking for work. Traditional functions of an employment agency include: researching open positions, identifying qualified people, screening candidates, and providing support to employers and employees who have been matched. SUR essentially engages in all of these tasks. However, because of the political status of their 'clients', the work that SUR does is more than what one would expect from a typical employment agency. The following section will use the employment agency model to describe the role of SUR as an employment agency, while also identifying the ways in which SUR is unique.

Researching Open Positions

Participant SR8 and SR9, are responsible for contacting companies, doing data collections, screening candidates, and preparing people for interviews. They are responsible for handling any and all practical issues that may occur after the recruitment is made, such as helping people with residence permit applications, helping people get tax cards, ensuring that they understand how the salary system works in Finland, how to fill out their timesheets, etcetera. SR8's main tasks are to oversee the Business Program and manage relationships with asylum seekers and refugees.

SR9 is responsible for the region's Employment Program, her main directive is to recruit new employers and maintain existing employer relationships. SR9 says that, for her, recruitment is the most difficult task:

To actually get the first person into a new company that's... that's something that is hard, for me that is. I don't know for other people but that's what I found really hard, to actually create that kind of a trust with the employer that they will take the first person in and they will try it with them and maybe, later on, take more people in. I don't concentrate on the employers who are a definite no from the get-go, I don't... you know I don't see that as something that I want to put time and effort into, but the ones who are *maybe* those are the ones who, obviously... need a bit more effort or are worth putting a bit more effort into (SR9).

SR9 explains that this task has been even more difficult over the last few months. She attributes this to a number of factors:

Especially after...what happened in Oulu the...the crime. At that point, the word asylum seeker became even more negative than it was before. Also, maybe the fact that they don't...have their residence permit yet. It's not certain that they get to stay in the country. So, the employer has to like wager whether it's a wise decision, business-wise to hire somebody that they're going to have to train and put a lot of time and effort into and then they might just have to leave the country a few months after (SR8).

Although, despite this risk, some companies still decided to hire asylum seekers. While this can stem from a sense of corporate social responsibility there is another, more practical reason, some companies choose to hire asylum seekers. They cannot find other workers. This is particularly true in the region's rural cities and towns, which over the past few decades have seen a sharp rise in outward migration.

E3B is a medium sized company in one such city. The men interviewed explained that they had done anything and everything possible to fill their open position but had been unable to find a qualified candidate in the area who was willing and able to do the job. They had been working with another recruitment agency, who then referred them to SUR. This first recruitment firm, in partnership with SUR, made the necessary arrangements to have the man moved from the town where he was living to E3B's town. The company agreed to SUR's standard three-week trial period, during which time the man received a prorated salary and had his housing costs covered. At the time of the interview, the man had been working at the company for just over eight months and the representatives from E3B reported being extremely satisfied with him as a worker. However, when asked whether or not they were planning to renew his contract they hesitated, not because of his legal status but because of production. They said they needed to wait to see if there would be a need. Although, despite this slight hesitation, when questioned about whether or not they would consider hiring another person through SUR. The company reported that it had already been in talks with SUR to recruit another employee. They hoped that the new hire would share the same mother tongue as the first employee that way the first man could train the new recruit.

This pattern was observed in all of the companies interviewed. Companies who had hired an asylum seeker were generally open to hiring more. Their stipulation was that the newcomers would share a common language that could help them integrate into the job. It was in this way

that they could overcome the language barrier. E7C was the furthest along in this process, having been one of the first companies in the area to recruit through SUR. At the time of the interview, E7C already had ten Arabic speaking workers on staff, working together on one 'line'. E7C had become somewhat of an advocate for SUR in the region as, because of the men he hired through SUR, the company was able to expand. In the interview, E7C described plans to open a new warehouse in another region of Finland, based on the model that they had started in the North. In fact, E7C explained that some of the men he had hired were actually able to receive work-based residence permits, because of their work with the company and could now permanently reside in Finland:

Well, currently we have 10 men who are Startup Refugees working, out of them, two have already this **työperäinen oleskelulupa** (work based residence permit) so they have been working with us close to a year now and they can permanently...kind of...stay at work; and in this process of...applying for this työperäinen oleskelulupa we have five guys who have been working, one of them over a year and the other guys maybe a half a year now. So, I would say that seven guys are...permanent workers already. One got out, not because of him, but because of this...työlupa (work permit) went out, so, we would like to keep him but he's now in the process and we are waiting to get their kind of...If you have these three negative decisions...you're not allowed to work anymore. So...we hope to get him back as soon as this process is done and then, about these seven plus one we have now three new trainees in the house. So...we think that we will operate till the end of the year with the system that we have. Nine guys working three guys in each shift and we work in three shifts and then about them we can take the most skilled guys to work on the factory side, who can drive the forklifts and use the machinery so, from nine to eleven I would say will be the number (E7C).

This number only pertains to the men working at the current factory, there have been talks of partnering with SUR's Southern Branch for the new factory. E7C is a prime example of what can happen when a company effectively utilizes this available labor source.

At the time of this research, SUR was in the middle of running what they called their 'Country Project' The purpose of this project was to help find workers for companies in rural areas who have had trouble finding workers in the past, companies like E3B and E5A. The project was funded through an EU initiative with a small portion coming from a local municipality. The goal was to support the creation of thirty jobs over the course of one year. At the time of the interviews, SUR was on track to achieve this goal. I asked SR8 what proportion of the people

who found jobs were asylum seekers versus refugees. He said that he could not say for sure but that, by his estimates, around ninety-nine percent of the people who had gotten jobs through this project were asylum seekers. He felt the need to clarify his answer:

I want to explain why it is such a big percentage, because asylum-seekers need jobs, and jobs are a way for them to get... a residence permit. So, the way they think is “I don't care where I go as long as I get a job” but on the other hand refugees...already have a residence permit. So, the way they think is “I need a job but I have certain...requirements for this job”. It needs to be in this city and maybe no other requirements, just maybe it has to be this city. Some know their skills and to use them. So they want...a job in their...field and others just want a job. So, it really depends on the person, the field, the skills and whether they are an asylum-seeker or refugee (SR8).

This is of particular interest for companies struggling to fill open positions. Asylum seekers are typically more willing to move for a job, take a job that is more physically demanding, or a job has unconventional shifts. The next section will focus on another aspect of SUR's work, identifying qualified people.

Identifying Qualified People

Of course, we can't help everybody but we ask everyone to come over or we arrange a day where we can do data collection and get their work history...We like to meet the people because from there we can interview them and, because we need the best good workers for the new companies who are like - hiring their first asylum seeker - we want the person to be somebody we trust 100% because the company has their, you know, first impression about all Arabic people or all asylum seekers by that one person. So, we really focus on that and then of course when we meet people all the time we...sort of make notes, mental notes that this is the kind of person I could put somewhere next or this is the kind of person who would be good for that, or if somebody leaves from some job...try to make notes, you know? Of who is very professional and feels different (SR6).

Another core component of the role SUR plays in the integration of asylum seekers into working life, involves utilizing their online database and experience with candidates to identify qualified people. As SR6 mentions in the above quote, this is particularly important when placing an individual at a company that is hiring their first asylum seeker. When asked about

what takes up the most working hours, all of the SUR employees interviewed listed data collection as the task that takes up the most time. As previously stated, it can take upwards of an hour to fill out one Match profile. This time is an opportunity, not just to learn about what experience the person has but to evaluate how they conduct themselves. SUR volunteers and employees are constantly assessing and reassessing the attitude and skill level of the people in its system, in the hopes of identifying qualified people.

All of the asylum seekers interviewed for this study would be considered highly skilled. Two of the men studied and worked as engineers in their home country. AS1C received a degree in computer engineering, while AS4A received his degree in electrical engineering and also worked as a sales engineer before coming to Finland. AS2C was one year short of completing a degree in law and expressed distress at being unable to continue his studies in Finland. Although none of the men interviewed were employed in their previous field, they all expressed gratitude at being able to find work in Finland:

You know any person in this life he has a dream. It is my dream to have work to help me to stay here. I have promised myself that I should be a good person at work. I do my best and I see myself now because I am a good person I stay in the same work and I will continue my work (AS2C).

The men interviewed were different in many ways, however, they all had one defining characteristic, they were extremely motivated to work. They had each been actively searching for employment since arriving in Finland. They had all engaged in some sort of voluntary work and seriously pursued their Finnish studies. AS4A volunteered with the Red Cross for six months after arriving in Finland, he enrolled in supplementary language classes, where he came to know SR6. AS4A attempted to find work on his own through various online websites but claims he did not receive even a single response. That was until, at SR6's recommendation, he filled out a Match profile and entered into the Match system:

AS4A: Ok, to be honest, I would not get this job without SUR.

Why?

AS4A: Because I tried before 100 times! And no one even answered me, but with Startup Refugees, because they have that kind of thing like a database. They choose the best candidates for the position, for the position they needed. Yeah, so without Startup Refugees I think it's really hard to get a job. Even the Finnish people can't help find a job in this way.

AS4A is a prime example of an ideal candidate for a first-time hire. SR6 first recommended him for another position, but he was rejected on account of him not having a driver's license. This did not deter SR6 and the next position she recommended for was with company E5A. His motivation and his commitment to learning is something that immediately set him apart, according to his employer:

Well, yeah, his [AS4A] Finnish skills were excellent and his education. He was like an engineer and we knew instantly that he could really help us out and he was really keen on learning. I think it was the first impression was...pretty good (E5A).

During the interview, the company revealed plans to keep him on and move him up through the organization. However, they too said this was contingent on demand for their product, which they said had been consistently rising over the last few years. When asked if they would be willing to take on more asylum seekers like AS4A, they responded that they would definitely consider it if they were like AS4A. They were hoping that AS4A could act as a supervisor and train new, Arabic speaking hires.

Although AS4A was doing quite well at his job, people like AS4A can be the most difficult cases for SUR employees to place. SR6 admits there is no good system in place for highly educated people in Finland. It is difficult for them to get their previous degrees recognized and for people like AS2C, who were close to graduating but were unable to complete, they have no way to access higher education in Finland. AS2C expressed that he would like to continue with his education, but that in his situation this was simply not an option. He was happy with the work he was doing and that he could earn his own money, not be dependent on the government, but not being able to continue with his studies was a sore subject. This is unfortunately not an unusual case and SUR employees have to be careful that the people they place are willing to take the job if offered one; even if the job may be considered a step down from what they had been doing previously. This leads to the topic of screening candidates, to ensure that they are the right fit for the job.

Screening Candidates

The Match Made in Startup Refugees system contains over 3,400 profiles from asylum seekers and refugees across Finland. This number comprises a diverse range of people with various levels of skills and expertise. As previously discussed, it is important that new companies are matched with ideal candidates. This means the screening process should be rigorous.

However, as a young NGO, SUR is working with limited resources. Meaning that often times the people filling out the profiles are volunteers who are not very familiar with the organization, with no training to identify a qualified candidate and no official way to communicate if they thought the person was qualified.

The ideal situation is when the individual matching the employee to the employer has filled out the Match profile with the job candidate. Unfortunately, as discussed, this is not always possible. As a result, sometimes people get lost in the system. The most 'active' ones are typically the ones who have the most success. These are the people who are consistently coming into the office to ask about job openings. They are the people most likely to be remembered when a job opens up. Although, of course, it also depends too on their skill level, their language skills, and the job requirements.

This leads back to the problem identified by SR9 in an earlier section, how to get employers who have never met you, and typically have never met an asylum seeker before, to trust that this person is an ideal candidate for the job:

I mean when we match somebody and say "Here is a good guy, he knows how to do this that and the next thing. I've met up with him a couple of times. I've interviewed him. I made a CV with him and I can recommend him." Then the company has to take a leap of faith and go "Okay I trust your judgment; you've done the groundwork with this guy and you recommend him to me." So, you know, based on my conception of the person they will either take them on or not. Obviously, then they'll make up their mind about the person when they start working and they see them in action things like that but yeah, I suppose at that point it's the trust- that they trust my judgment...and then when the person goes into the company that's when they need to convince the boss to keep them on, basically (SR9).

This again leads back to the importance of trust. In the case of E7C, SUR already had their trust based on the preexisting relationship between E7C and SR6. However, the situation is very different when dealing with an employer who does not know the organization or its people. This issue is amplified when negative images of asylum seekers are splashed across the media. SR9 describes her role in that sense as akin to a salesperson:

I suppose you have to have some marketing skills as well, in a sense, when you contact the employers you know how to sell your employees or the people who are looking for work. The right terminology to use and the right sort of keywords to use and

how to get your foot in the door or how to get a meeting, things like that. You have to do a bit of research as well, so you don't just kind of...especially when you're talking about employers in the rural areas. If you say, "Hi! I'm a city girl phoning up pretending like I know what you need." You have to do...a bit of background research on that and find out what the situation actually is in that area and stuff like that. It doesn't have to be anything else apart from actually asking the company and the employer themselves or like just admitting that you know very little about their situation, but you want to help, what is it that they need from us sort of a thing (SR9).

As an employment agency, it is important when screening candidates to understand the company's needs. However, for SUR it is also important to know and understand the laws and regulations pertaining to asylum seekers so that it is easy to explain to companies what hiring an asylum seeker entails. The next section will discuss the concrete measures SUR undertakes to ensure that hiring an asylum seeker is as painless as possible for potential employers.

Providing Support to Employers

Well, to get to understand...the process...to take somebody to do this training in the factory that's not difficult but then to understand what it takes, this kind of asylum seeker who doesn't have a security number, they don't have a passport, how to get to a bank account, and how to get the tax card, and then how to apply for this työperäin oleskelulupa (work permit), and what you have to do in order to get the application. You have to open the working positions and you have to do the interviews and etcetera etcetera. So, none of the actions are actually that hard but to get the picture, to know what you need to do. Now if somebody asks I can tell what it takes, but then, in the beginning, of course, we didn't know and I don't know if anybody knew how the process in reality then goes and if it's fast or slow and who takes the responsibility and so on; and also that you have to, when you do, for example, open these working positions and you do the interviews then you have to write a report and you have to kind of name the guys that came in and why you didn't choose them and so on and so on. So, you kind of have to make a detailed Excel. So then, if you do the work kind of in detail already from the beginning, then it's not a big thing to send the report, but if you don't take any notes for example or if you don't make the interviews or you make a shortcut somewhere then it's kind of a pain (E7C).

As one of the first companies in the region to hire asylum seekers E7C remembers when the hiring process was, to a certain extent, still being refined. The additional steps make hiring an asylum seeker much less appealing than hiring a Finnish person, or another type of immigrant with a more secure political situation. This coupled with the fact that the rules and regulations regarding asylum seekers are constantly in flux, make the prospect of hiring an asylum seeker undesirable. However, since that time SUR has managed to create a system to help remove some of the administrative burdens from employers. The network now has systems in place to manage policy changes when they happen. For example, in late May of 2019 when the Finnish Immigration Service announced a change in the law regarding asylum seekers right to work, the SUR network immediately reached out to The Finnish Immigration Service, the employers, and the asylum seekers who would all be affected by the change. Without the concerted effort of the SUR network to ensure that all relevant stakeholders had the necessary information, there could have been serious repercussions for asylum seekers who were affected by this change but unaware of how to proceed. In the case of the employers, they do not have the time nor the will to remain vigilant regarding changes in the system.

To have an organization like SUR available to keep employers up to date on the latest changes eases some of the risk involved with hiring asylum seekers. In fact, E7C goes on to say that the last few guys the company hired through SUR already had their paperwork completed when they came in for the interview. SUR has been able to create a system around the hiring process that makes hiring asylum seekers more feasible. Now, typically, by the time the prospective employee goes in for the interview they already have a bank account and tax-card ready. SUR also helps those who have secured a permanent placement apply for work-based residency. The organization handles any problems which may arise with the application process and even situations occurring on the job. This can range from issues regarding annual leave, sick days work, working hours, to interoffice disputes. These responsibilities now typically fall to SR8, who is fluent in both Arabic, Finnish and English. He is responsible for ensuring that asylum seekers are fully aware of their rights and duties. This allows the system to operate relatively smoothly.

However, in the beginning, there was no such system in place. E7C described the potential consequences of not following procedure, recounting the situation that occurred with their first asylum seeker employee, Mostafa:

We still have the first guy who came in, maybe we did not do the right thing at the right time or whatever, but his...tyoperainen oleskelulupa (work permit) process went...to Southern Finland and no one ever came back about any questions and now they have been trying to get this application to [the Northern] area; because here when I wrote the report it only took a few weeks before we got the positive answer for the other guys, but the first application that's kind of been in for almost a year now and nobody knows what's going to happen...It's a thing now we know the process and now we know already the right office here and how things work and things work quite fluently so to say (E7C).

E7C is unsure what exactly went wrong with Mostafa's application, one can only speculate about why it happened, but the most important thing is that it can happen and there are serious consequences when things go wrong:

There are some extra actions [hiring an asylum seeker] because if a Fin comes to you typically, they already have all the details...they have a tax card and a bank account so you don't need to care about this...then I would say the biggest minus with these guys is that if they already have these negative decisions; that's what happened with one really good guy who got really nicely started and was working for maybe four or five months and then suddenly it's an announcement from the police that there is no more allowance to work that now it's three negative maybe they will take him back to Iraq. So... but you could lose the guy just like that even though we would like to keep him, and the guy would like to work but there's nothing you can do. This is kind of a risk that you don't have with the local ones (E7C).

This risk is enough to deter potential employers from hiring asylum seekers. Additionally, the system is not designed to make it easy to hire asylum seekers. Employers need to, as E7C says "make it sound urgent" that you need workers. In fact, by law the position needs to be opened for a certain period of time so that anyone can apply for the job:

We opened the positions and then at first when we were taking in the second two guys at the same time, we took in three Finns there were altogether six. The first time, one of them got a better working position at the mill and one of them just got bored didn't like the job and one of them was just also getting some...it's this typical Finn thing. There's a pain in your back that cannot be calculated or measured in any way. You feel pain in your back and you feel pain in your back; so, you know so you cannot work and then you can stay home... like an hour basic worker it's not a big thing for the employee but the work is not done if you stay at home. So, the worst case was that's out

of five weeks of work the guy was almost 4 weeks at home so what kind of resource is that? It's not worth kind of keeping but with these guys...For example, in previous training there was three guys and one of them was not motivated enough from the work and he said it himself that this does not feel like it's his work and also the previous one we took four out of the five but one was kind of sleeping mostly and as I said not everyone can be successful (E7C).

So, even with the help of SUR there can be those who are not motivated to continue, but the procedures they have in place makes it easy for an employer to let someone go after the trial period. This is particularly helpful, as according to Finnish law it can be quite difficult to let someone go after they have signed a contract. SUR is still working to refine these practices to ensure that they can meet the needs of both the employers and the asylum seekers or refugees who depend on their services. However, SUR is more than just an employment agency. The organization also serves as an education service provider specializing in labor market specific skills.

5.2.2 Education Service Provider

The idea is not to create actual businesses, right now, at this stage. The idea is to give the necessary information and kind of like, in an indirect way... tackle things like Gray Zone Businesses. Where you have people, who start a business and then they are not familiar with some customs and some rules of running a business here. Let's say, taxation and then they would like run into trouble later in their businesses because of a lack of knowledge. So, basically, the idea is to give all the knowledge, and not make anybody an entrepreneur if they're not really interested in it. So, we are not, of course, it is one goal to have businesses started but it's not the main goal. I would say... it's an educational goal. The goal is educational and not economical, but we do help them to test their ideas and after the program to get all the necessary support to start this business. Also, this is a good way for many people to get connected with potential...employers or broaden their network and meet people who might help them, in one way or another. If they want to start the business later, they get support from the mentors and the speakers or if they notice that this is not for me and they want to get a job, maybe that's a possibility as well (SR8).

In this passage, SR8 is referring to the Startup Refugee Business Program, which ran in the spring of 2019. The Business Program is an essential component of SUR's work, as discussed in the background chapter of this research. However, this is not the only educationally based program that SUR curates. Over the course of this study, SUR facilitated a number of educationally based initiatives. I have chosen to focus on five core educational services: the Business Program, work certificate workshops, skills workshops, and educational events. The following section will expand on the Business Program introduced in the Methodology chapter of this study.

Business Program

As was previously discussed, I was temporarily employed by SUR to aid in the development of the region's first Business Program. The goals of this program is threefold: (1) to educate participants on Finnish working culture and practices, providing them with the knowledge and tools they need to start a business in Finland (2) to help participants network with local companies and influencers (3) to expand participants knowledge and help them grow their professional skills. The program included both 'workshops' and 'track days'. Workshops are lessons guided by professionals focusing on a number of topics including: owning a business in Finland, market research, taxation, how to secure funding, general marketing, accounting, skills development, and pitching. The participants also met individually with a counselor to create personal plans, which mapped out their individual goals for the program. Track days were designed to help participants put their knowledge into practice by working on their ideas, developing their business models, or attending company visits.

The program received mostly positive feedback, however, as I explained in a previous section we did struggle with retention. There were some participants who were less engaged. This may have had something to do with the content of the program and schedule. As the program did span three months, with sessions twice a week two times a month. There were talks of holding subsequent programs over a shorter span of time with more frequent classes to help keep participants engaged. Additionally, the site where the program was held was geographically isolated making it difficult for organizers to transport speakers as SR8 explains:

It's such a small city that it's very hard to find speakers it's very hard to...move people around because we would have to move the people from there, the participants to

come here and do things...we don't have all the possibilities that they have [the Southern branch] or the resources (SR8).

In this quote SR8 also remarks on the difference between the Northern branch and the Southern branch. He points out that the Southern branch has more resources, this idea will be explored in greater detail in the challenges section of this chapter.

Skills Workshops

In one of the Match system's final prompts (see Appendix 3), users are asked if they require any Finnish work certificates. Job seekers are provided a list of common certificates that may be needed at various jobs in Finland, such as an alcohol pass, hygiene certificate, occupational safety card, firework license, first aid certificate, and a road work safety card. The form provides options for the user to select one of three choices for each certificate: yes, I have it; no, but I need it; no, I don't need it. This makes it easy for SUR to identify who has these licenses and who needs or wants them. When the study began SUR was organizing these classes semi-regularly, to help people who wanted these certificates to get them. In order to receive a certification, an individual must pass a written test, most of which are available in a number of languages. On several occasions, SUR organized supplementary classes, in various languages, to help people pass the exams. Previously, the organization had funding to even help a number of these people pay the cost of sitting these tests, however, by the Spring of 2019 they could no longer cover the full cost and instead could only partially cover the cost of the test for a few individuals.

In addition, SUR organized a wide variety of other types of skills workshops. These workshops were varied in nature and occasionally organized with the support of network partners. The author observed classes concerning working life in Finland (as described in the methodology chapter). Also included under this heading would be workshops regarding how to search for jobs online or perform basic functions on the computer. These classes were secondary to some of the other work, but only because the organization did not have sufficient funding to hire someone who focused solely on organizing these types of classes.

English Classes

SUR also supported a group of volunteers who were arranging their own sessions at the reception center. In the Spring of 2019, five students from a local university began arranging English classes for a volunteering course offered at the university. SUR was not actively involved in either content creation or marketing of the classes but did support the volunteers by sponsoring the students' bus tickets and providing them with letters of recommendation and certificates of completion. As mentioned previously, other than basic Finnish classes provided by the reception centers other types of classes are strictly volunteer based, so supporting these types of initiatives helps to improve both the lives and skills of the people in the centers.

Events

We had this Impact Lunch...we called it Fusion Business Lunch....it was a very nice event. It was sort of a try out for something impactful for companies where we wanted to invite CEOs and the kind of people who are in positions to make decisions in companies, we invited them there to talk about different topics about social impact and our perspective with the SUR it was "refugees got talent" so we brought out the different kinds of ways, the different kinds of talents that our people have, there was a photographer there were different people making lunch...we had collected different kinds of pictures from people's phones about what they had done in their home country and other keynotes...the idea was to bring out and show people in different ways what kinds of talents these people have and to meet them and talk to them (SR6).

Another key component of SUR's role in the integration of asylum seekers in Northern Finland, which I place under the category of educational service is providing a platform for asylum seekers to engage with other members of the community. One such initiative discussed in the background chapter of this study was the Work Tank events. Although these also served as an opportunity to hold a large number of job interviews, these events were supplemented with classes designed to support employment. Additionally, the organization was active in the region's startup scene. These sorts of activities help both recruit volunteers by marketing the organization and its activities as well as crowdsourcing new ideas. Often, asylum seekers and refugees will be invited to the events to help grow their networks. The above quote discusses

another event organized by SUR in 2017, the Fusion Business Lunch, as participant SR6 described it was an opportunity for asylum seekers and refugees to interact with community influencers and business owners. SUR also attends various city and cultural events.

These types of activities can be particularly significant as often in Finland, refugee reception centers are located in geographically isolated areas away from the general public. Therefore, those living at these centers have very little opportunity to engage with Finnish people. This can create a situation in which asylum seekers begin to resent the native population. A point that SR6 brought up in her interview when she was discussing her previous work during the heat of the Refugee Crisis in 2016:

At the time everybody got negative decisions, to their asylum applications and the whole atmosphere was very depressing. We had about...five reception centers here in this area and all of them were jammed, like crowded. So many people there, stuffed in small rooms and everybody was just waiting for their negative decision so, it was very hopeless the whole thing and then there was a lot of negativity towards us, as well, like the people who came to reception centers and came to help and came to ask these questions: “what can you do?” and “what you want to do?” Do you want to play with us basically, so...sometimes they were quite negative and saying just like, you’re just...you get paid for our misery, basically. That was like the feeling, for some, and we really felt this especially in these smaller cities (SR6)

Although the tension has since ebbed with the number of asylum seekers entering Europe diminishing over the past few years, there remains a certain negative stigma attached to the term asylum seeker, which is palpable. This sort of stigma may lead to feelings of depression, anxiety, and hostility in an already vulnerable population. Asylum seekers’ uncertain political, economic, and social status can pose a hefty challenge for the individuals trying to start a new life in a foreign land, and those trying to help them. The next section will discuss some of the challenges the various stakeholders in this study face.

5.3 Stakeholder Challenges

In isolating the role of SUR in the integration of asylum seekers in Northern Finland I became aware of a number of challenges in the integration process. Although, the challenges are unique to each group I have broken them into three main themes, which describe the nature of

these challenges. These issues may be inferred from topics discussed in previous sections of this study but will be expanded upon here. The three main categories I place these challenges under are: structural challenges, resource-related challenges, and challenges stemming from insecurity. Structural challenges relate to challenges regarding the structure of both the Finnish system and of the organization SUR and how these constructions play out in practice. Resource related challenges pertain to issues regarding funding but also to the availability of social capital. The final challenge identified is attributed to an overall lack of security in the work be it the continuity of SUR, the asylum seekers ability to remain in the country, or the laws and regulations governing asylum seekers. This issues will be discussed in depth here as well as the ramifications of this insecurity on the different stakeholder groups included in this study.

5.3.1 Structural

It's quite tough. I mean there's a policy that Finland receives refugees but the processes that take place after the people come here and apply for asylum are way too long and they are way too stiff and they are not thorough enough...I don't know why the process takes so long. When in a lot of cases the person gets interviewed once and in the worst case scenario the interview takes place in about 2-3 hours and that includes interpretation, which means that somebody makes a decision on whether or not asylum is granted based on an hour's interview that has been interpreted. I think that's, completely insane, and it's not alright at all and also the system right now does not take into consideration The fact that if somebody has been, for example tortured, or has gone through a lot in their country of their origin, which is why they have left and applied for asylum in Finland, that they're not most likely going to open up about that or experience to a stranger and an interpreter who is from their own culture so they don't necessarily understand the sort of gravity of the situation when they're going into this interview and then they get only one chance and one interview (SR9)

SR9 paints a rather bleak portrait of the situations for asylum seekers in Finland. The above quote makes a number of troubling assertions about how the system in Finland is designed. SR9 discusses a number of issues with how asylum seekers are inducted into the country.

However, it may be interesting to note that when posed the same question SR8 had a very different answer regarding another part of the integration process.

I think Finland has a good policy towards Asylum Seekers. Of course, well it's better than...many other European countries if you think about it, like Asylum Seekers get the chance to work. They get the chance to be part of society while they're waiting for the process to happen. So, I guess it's good, it's okay. Many things could be better but in general, it's good, moderate (SR8).

These two statements represent two very different takes on Finland's asylum policy. SR9 focuses on the bureaucratic processes governing asylum applications, while SR8 describes the opportunities asylum seekers have while they are waiting for their applications to be processed. These two statements demonstrate just how divided the issue can be. SR8 makes the comparison to other European countries policies towards asylum seekers, however, comparatively speaking, Finland does not take in nearly as many asylum seekers as other European countries. This is in part due to the processes SR9 refers to in her quote.

I have previously asserted that the government's latest scheme to make voluntary return more 'enticing' and its investment in programs designed to help assess the validity of asylum claims (Immigration Department, 2018, 20) undermines legitimate attempts to integrate asylum seekers. I refer back to Allport's four key conditions for positive intergroup contact to substantiate this claim. In his research Allport maintains that support from laws, authorities or customs greatly improves contact as an indicator for prejudice reduction (Allport, 1954, 274). My assessment is that the government's latest move to further restrict the rights of asylum seekers to work does not support prejudice reduction, as it projects an air of mistrust towards asylum seekers. This acts in direct opposition to the advice given by the Association of Local and Regional Governments in Finland, presented in the background chapter of this study. I also refer back to the definition of integration in the section on the definition of terms section. The Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration defines integration as the "interactive development involving immigrants and society as large (362/2005)" this would suggest that prejudice reduction should be a priority for the government.

Another structural issue I uncovered relates to employers with asylum seeker workers. As discussed in the previous section, employers who hire asylum seekers may do so because they struggle to find workers from their local labor supply. The government is aware of this issue,

as explained in the background chapter of this work, emphasizing the importance of labor migration to enhance employment. However, when employers in rural areas attempt to utilize the existing labor supply of asylum seekers in the country they receive no support from the government, even if it directly benefits the municipality in which they operate. For employers hiring from SUR presents as risk, but often employers have no other viable option. In the following quote a translator describes what happened after E3B hired their first asylum seeker from SUR, who will be referred to here as Zamir:

Basically, they're getting no support from the government and no support from the municipality or society in general. They got in touch with the municipality when Zamir came and asked if they could...get a reduction in the rent, because he would move in here and he would start paying tax to the Municipality, but the Municipality didn't see that as a relevant or important thing and...there are no sort of structures in place, at the moment where this particular company, or any company in Finland as far as I understand would get any kind of support in this kind of situation. There are a lot of unemployed people in [name of town] as well, but talking on paper they're unemployed, but in practice, they're actually unable to work for some reason or another. So, if you look at the numbers it says you know there's a certain number of people who are unemployed in [name of town] as well then you know, they go "well why can't they just, you know, work" but they're actually unable to work for one reason or another so the situation is that they would need they need people from the outside anyway; and they also have a lot of empty apartments at the moment so there are there's accommodation available (E3B).

The above quote highlights a real issue with how the system is designed. The reality is that hiring an asylum seeker poses a risk. There is a lot of paperwork that needs to be done. The rules are constantly changing and there is always a chance that the person's asylum application will be denied and they will be forced to leave the country. A quote in the preceding section from E7C remarked that once you know what to do the process is not that difficult, however, there is no easy way for employers to get information about the process. This is why organizations, like SUR, who specialize in knowing the rules governing asylum seekers are so important.

The issue for asylum seekers in this process stems from a built-in failsafe for the employers, whereby they can employ an asylum seeker for a short period of time without creating a long-term contract. This is a way for employers to circumvent Finland's strict employment contract

laws, which make it difficult to let go of an employee without justified cause. In addition, in order for any non-EU/EEA national to apply for a work based residence permit Finnish law dictates that employers must establish that there is no available Finn or other EU/EEA national willing and able to do the job (“Residence permit for an employed person (TTOL),” 2019). In order for an asylum seeker to apply for a work-based residence permit their contract has to be at least a year. This means that an employed asylum seeker is ineligible to receive a work-based residence permit if their contract is for less than one year. A fact AS4A made all too clear when I asked him if he had applied for a work-based residence permit:

AS4A: Not work, because he didn’t make the contract for me for more than six.

So, your contract is...?

AS4A: It’s for 6 months then they renew for the new 6 months and when I ask from the [recruitment company] they made it like this. Every six month they will renew.

So, um have you received any decisions on your asylum application?

AS4A: I got my first negative decision; it was one year and eight months ago and I’m still waiting.

The day of the interview was the first day of AS4A’s second six-month contract with E5A, meaning that in actuality he had been contracted to work for one year. After nearly two years of waiting for his asylum application, AS4A would be forced to keep waiting, even though his employer did decide to extend his contract AS4A is not eligible to apply for a work-based residence permit. An article released in the summer of last year by Finnish news outlet Yle asserts that even if he could apply for a work based residence permit it may take much more than the four-month waiting period laid down in the Aliens’ Act for applicants to receive a decision on their work permit (“Welcome to Finland—but your work permit might take some time,” 2018). That brings AS4A’s waiting time up to three years for a job he is overqualified for at a company struggling to find workers.

The Finnish system allows asylum seekers to work but does not provide any recourse with which to actually find work. In fact, the system in place can actually works to limit asylum seekers ability to find work by making it difficult for employers to hire them. This is why organizations, like SUR, which specialize in assisting asylum seekers and refugees to find work are so important. SUR not only helps asylum seekers find work but also provides educational opportunities that are beneficial both in the long term, in terms of securing future employment; and in the short term, helping asylum seekers to stay active while their applications are being processed. However, the fact that SUR is a non-profit, presents certain challenges.

Another structural challenge identified pertains to the structure of the organization SUR itself. The organization's lack of clear structure gives employees the freedom to pursue their own projects and ideas, but can also create feelings of self-doubt as SR8 explains:

Taking into consideration that we are a young NGO. Not having that...this feels like such a different place to work compared to other jobs I've done. Not having a strong hierarchy... Not being really that clear about the structure of things (SR8).

The sentiment expressed here by participant SR8 represents a feeling that is experienced by many workers at NGOs of this nature. These more organic organizations evolve from a basic need. However, solutions to problems are based more on intuition than on existing structures. This fosters innovation and creativity but can also create issues when people are producing their own more complicated solutions to problems that already have solutions. When employees have good ideas, they are praised and told to execute the idea, however, they are not always given much in the way of support with actually putting these ideas into practice. Communication can also be an issue in such situations. I mentioned previously how, in the Southern branch, SUR employees usually accompany candidates to job interviews. This may provide some comfort to the job seekers who know they have someone there to support them and also presents a strong front to potential employers. The Northern branch does not engage in such practice. This is one example of a norm in the Southern branch that was simply not communicated to the Northern branch. Although, ultimately this practice may not suit the needs of the Northern region. The differences in culture between the two branches can be a source of friction. This leads to another key difference between the branches, which is access to resources.

5.3.2 Resource

The Center for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment, Ely Keskus. Yeah, they've been good as well. There is no like...there are no services or before us, there were no services helping asylum seekers to find jobs they are not customers at the TE keskus (TE-Office) because they don't have residence permits. You know there is no funding for them, there is no anything for them basically. The basic funding that they get is for their language tuition, which is like 5 hours of Finnish per week, that's it (SR9).

As was outlined in the section on Integration and Employment, asylum seekers are afforded very little in regard to services from the public sector. There are of course international rules, which guarantees asylum seekers' basic needs are met, however, not much beyond that. I have cited previous studies, suggesting that extensive time out of the job market can be detrimental for those fleeing persecution, as well as studies advocating letting asylum seekers work (see Chapter 2). SUR helps asylum seekers to navigate the Finnish job market and provides them with educational opportunities that can be used in Finland and beyond. The true impact of work on asylum seekers future prospects has yet to be measured. However, I have seen first-hand how meaningful it can be to a person when they get a job even if it is only temporary as this quote explains:

The results have been good people have been happy. It seems like everybody is happy when they get a job (SR8).

SUR is acting to help people who want to work find employers who are struggling to find workers, it is a service both for the individuals and society. Although, as SR6 points out it may sometimes feel like this contribution is not recognized by the wider community. When questioned about what could make her more effective at her job SR6's response was:

I would say better communication. We have a good working relationship with the Employment Office, but the Employment Office...I know they have said it themselves - the system should be...somehow renewed. The system is not, for instance, they don't have a marketing system. If I want to...invite all...the people that we're trying to help, the people in our target group. If I want to invite them for an event somewhere a... recruitment event. They don't have a system of how to do that. They don't have like a marketing system there at all. They can't send messages to everyone; they don't have it. It's and it's weird, they say that the best way to reach these people is going to Kultokolukus, the language courses, and just go and market it there yourself so...(SR6)

So, that is what SUR has done and they have been successful. The Northern branch has now seen an increase both in the number of asylum seekers and refugees soliciting their services. All of the SUR workers reported having a good working relationship with the TE-Office and the TE-Office has even begun referring their refugee customers to SUR because they get results fast. It is important that third-sector actors like SUR are able to work effectively with both the public and private sectors.

One challenge that impacts the Northern branch specifically is access to resources in the form of both social capital and actual capital. SUR began in the South and is therefore more established in the Southern region. Additionally, the attitudes and culture in the South of Finland are very different from those in the North. There is more diversity in the Capital Region as it is typically a point of entry for immigrants. The cold geographically isolated North has only just begun to see the emergence of a large number of immigrants into the region. In some of the more rural towns and cities the entrance of immigrants, specifically, asylum seekers can be particularly jarring. This can impact operations in the North to a certain degree as explained by SR6 when discussing the first Business Program in the North:

Because we are not... [the South] ...they have so many contacts and the companies there, you know, the entities the people they cooperate with are more cooperative than here, I guess...when it comes to this kind of thing. So, we've had to modify some things and maybe also the budget that we're working with is smaller so we can't do all the things we wish to do. So, there are many modifications. Also, the program is in such a small city that it's very hard to find speakers it's very hard to, kind of like, move people around because we would have to move the people from there, the participants to come here and do things, you know. We don't have all the possibilities that they have or the resources (SR8).

This may be difficult for some in the Southern branch to understand, which can be a source of conflict between branches. The lack of a strong organizational structure may also contribute to these feelings. The branches do communicate daily through Slack, engage in a weekly Skype call, and have regular team days to ensure positive feelings and open communication. The branches typically work well together, however, at times geographic differences can translate differences in working culture. This brings me back to a comment from Allport, which argues that in order for civilian led agencies and organizations to be effective they need to have concrete goals and objectives otherwise they are destined to fail. There have been talks in the North of expanding operations to include other immigrant groups in the region, however, broadening the focus may impact their ability to effectively meet the needs of their target group. Additionally, the name Startup Refugees does not easily transfer to other immigrant groups. If the organization does want to extend to other immigrant groups, it may be best to do so by creating a new non-profit under the Phoenix umbrella. Otherwise, it may overextend itself and cause the organization's objectives to become muddled.

SR8 also points out the difference in financial resources between the branches. This can be seen in the funding for events and programs but also for personnel. Although, the Northern branch has been able to grow and currently there are enough people on staff to help fairly distribute the workload. The branch is still working to build lucrative relationships with businesses and institutions in the surrounding area. There are prospects for potential partners it just takes time and when working with asylum seekers time is not guaranteed. SR8 described just how impactful the issue of funding can be on daily activities when I asked what the most challenging aspect of the job was for him:

Everything always depends on funding. So, you feel like you can't really give it...I feel like you can't really give it your all...work is hard. I just focus on the most important things but not having a long-term contract kind of makes you unsure of the continuity of your job. So, this is the hardest thing I guess (SR8).

The issue of funding was always at the forefront of the SUR employees' minds. Funding dictate what kind of programs they can organize, how many people they can have on staff, and how many people they can help. This quote also leads into the final challenge that will be discussed here, the issue of insecurity.

5.3.3 Insecurity

The final challenge, to be discussed here is that of continuity. In the last quote SR8 remarked on how the lack of stability can impact job performance. This lack of security was mentioned by all the SUR employees, in one way or another. I myself experienced this first-hand when working with SUR on the Business Program there were talks of keeping me on staff, however, the issue of funding was an ever-looming and my lack of Finnish language skills did put me at somewhat of a disadvantage. In many ways this challenge is at the heart of the asylum issue. The feelings of insecurity on the part of SUR workers is just one way it manifests. This issue touches every part of the asylum issue.

When the Refugee Crisis of 2016 hit the unprecedented number of asylum seekers shocked the Finnish system the effects of which can still be seen today in the country's political rhetoric. Although, the number of asylum seekers entering the country has since ebbed, the threat of another wave of asylum seekers looms over the whole of Europe. The perceived threat has

sparked a number of new policy changes across the continent. These changes have real consequences for asylum seekers caught in the middle. It also affects the people working with asylum seekers and refugees who need to stay vigilant about the latest regulatory changes.

Third-sector actors, like SUR, are particularly vulnerable as their funding is largely dependent on public grants, EU initiatives and private backers. Apart from private backers, the other two main sources of income are directly impacted by these policy changes. SUR's position as a non-profit means that it cannot charge for its services. SR8 offers a possible solution to this problem suggesting the organization move out of the third-sector entirely:

Not getting answers, quick enough...not being sure about the continuity of your work. That's kind of always in the background because you never know, "are we going to continue here?" like "do we have enough funding for this year?" ...So, that's always...stressful but it's part of this NGO world, I guess. That's why I would prefer if we would be an actual company or be something between an NGO and the company, a private company (SR8)

There have been discussions of taking SUR out of the third-sector. However, it appears some within the organization echo the concerns identified by R.H. Chenhall et al. (2010, 738) that the pursuit of economic capital will damage cultural capital. It is outside the scope of this study to say whether or not SUR should enter into the private-sector. However, my findings do suggest that feelings of insecurity negatively affect employee performance at SUR. The section on the role of SUR in the employment process described how difficult it could be to take a risk on hiring an asylum seeker. This may in part be due to certain preconceptions about asylum seekers, but it can also stem from the companies having a general sense of risk aversion.

The uncertain status of asylum seekers makes hiring them a definite risk. I discussed some reasons why a company would still choose to take on that risk, however, there are consequences to this decision. Previously, I quoted EC7 who actually lost one of his "really good" workers due to a processing error. They were hopeful that they could get this employee back, but there is a very real chance that they will be unable to re-employ him. I asked E3B if they would be willing to hire another asylum seeker if their current hire Zamir was unable to get a residence permit in Finland, their reply was a bit ambiguous:

The way they see it is that they've invested into Zamir right now, because they're hoping that when he's been here for a while then he can start you know, training other people, whether they're asylum-seekers or not, but who speak, speak the same language so it would be a huge loss for them if he would have to go and then they would have to start the whole process from the from the beginning so... (E3B).

They did not explicitly state if they would hire another asylum seeker. Instead, they emphasized the importance of Zamir continuing on with the company and training new Arabic speaking employees on how to do this job. A job that Finnish people were not interested in doing, but that was still very much needed. The political status of these asylum seekers may be uncertain, however, at least for the companies interviewed, the necessity of these workers was without question. The next and final chapter will attempt to interpret and describe the above findings to better clarify for the reader the significance of this research.

6 Discussion

In the fifteen months I was involved with Startup Refugees I observed a wide variety of events and programs organized with or by the organization. Additionally, I was able to see the effects of a number of policy changes, which were proposed and implemented over the course of this study. I was able to witness first-hand the influence of these changes on various stakeholders in the integration process, specifically, asylum seekers, NGO workers, and those currently employing asylum seekers. The following paragraphs will attempt to synthesize these findings.

6.1 Dissemination of Research Findings

The results of this study support previous studies, which suggest that third-sector actors have a significant impact on the integration of asylum seekers. It provides a detailed account of the role of one such organization, Startup Refugees, on the integration of asylum seekers into the labor market in Northern Finland and how it leverages social capital to employ asylum seekers.

This study attempts to fill a gap in research pertaining to the employment of asylum seekers. The findings of this study support the idea that asylum seekers can contribute to the economy of their host societies. In addition, asylum seekers who earn a salary receive less money from the public sector, which reduces the financial burden on the state (“Reception allowance,” n.d.). This study suggests that the employment of asylum seekers may also help decrease the dependency ratio, as a large portion of the asylum seekers entering Finland have a significant portion of their working life ahead of them. This study provides evidence that asylum seekers are willing to work in industries struggling to find workers from the native population. It also documents one case where a company was able to expand operations because of its asylum seeker workers. The following section will explore the theoretical implications of this work.

6.2 Theoretical Implications

This section will examine the theoretical implications of this research on future research and policy decisions regarding the employment of asylum seekers in Finland. It is broken into two sections, one for each of the theories mentioned. The first section will discuss how this research adds to existing literature on Social Capital Theory. The second section will explore findings related to Intergroup Conflict Theory.

6.2.1 Social Capital Theory

As previously stated, this is a particular case that was not designed to generalize across cases or extend theory, instead it offers support for existing assumptions posed by Social Capital Theory. In the analysis chapter of this study I identified two main roles of SUR in the integration of asylum seekers and refugees in Northern Finland that of an employment agency and an education service provider. In each category I distinguished four sub-categories related to the given function. **Table 2** contains a summary of each of the aforementioned roles and its connection to social capital to better illuminate for the reader how SUR leverages social capital to integrate asylum seekers and refugees into the Finnish labor market. This table was inspired by the work of R.H. Chenhall et al (2010), who conducted research on an NGO based in Australia. Although, the NGOs featured have very different target groups and operate in very different regions interesting parallels can be drawn between these two cases. Particularly, the influence of formal management control systems on the organizations' outcomes. Although, that topic is beyond the scope of this study.

Table 2

The role of SUR and its relation to social capital

Role of SUR	Specific Practices	Relation to social capital
Employment Agency		
Researching Open Positions	Calling companies to inquire about open positions and company needs	Creating a bond with the companies in order to broker bridging ties between the companies and the asylum seekers

Identifying Qualified People	Meeting with job seekers for pre-interviews, filling out their job histories, identifying their skills, suggesting supplemental classes	Getting to know the job seekers to better match them with companies; creating a bond with the asylum seekers in order to broker bridging ties between the asylum seeker/refugee and the companies; developing labor market specific skills for those who need them
Screening Candidates	Matching qualified candidates with potential employers	Bridging the asylum seeker and employer network thereby extending the collective social capital available to all stakeholder groups
Providing Support to the Employer	Taking care of practical matters regarding asylum seekers' paperwork including licenses and permits, ensuring the person is acclimating well to the job	Facilitating the bridging process
<hr/> Education Service Provider <hr/>		
Business Program	Supporting the entrepreneurship ideas of asylum seekers and refugees	Developing the human capital of asylum seekers/refugees by providing them with labor market specific skills; helping build bonding social capital with other refugees/asylum seekers in the same program
Skills Workshops	Aiding in the development of labor market skills	Developing the human capital of asylum seekers/refugees by providing them with labor market specific skills; helping build bonding social capital with other refugees/asylum seekers in the same program
English Classes	Providing opportunities for asylum seekers to stay active	Developing the human capital of asylum seekers/refugees by providing them with labor market specific skills; helping build bonding social capital with other refugees/asylum seekers in the same program
Events	Providing networking opportunities for asylum seekers to grow their network in Finland	Facilitating the development of bonding and bridging social capital by providing a platform for asylum seekers/refugees to network with other members of the community; marketing the SUR brand thereby expanding the organizations social capital

The service provided by SUR goes beyond a simple employment agency or an educational service provider. The organization works as an instrument for structural bridging, cutting across ethnic divides and spanning structural holes. This according to Lancee (2010, 29), would make SUR a bridging institution. This service provides value to the individuals, companies, and the state. The fact that companies have been able to profit from the use of asylum seekers' labor suggests that instituting policies, supporting the employment of asylum seekers could be beneficial to the Finnish economy. It is also vital to have some sort of intermediary, like SUR, to help facilitate the bridging process. The next section will assess the influence of Intergroup Contact Theory on this research.

6.2.2 Intergroup Contact Theory

Intergroup Contact Theory was employed as a secondary theory in this case. Although, I did witness first-hand how intergroup contact did ease tensions during my time in the field the research here did not produce enough evidence to support Allport's four key conditions to prejudice reduction. When questioned about how the asylum seeker workers were interacting with their Finnish counterparts both the employers and the asylum seekers claimed that there was no visible conflict between the two groups. Although, there are many reasons why participants would not have felt comfortable expressing any intergroup tensions to me, even if there had been issues. However, an interesting caveat identified by E7C was the budding tension between members of the intragroup, as senior members ascended to more prominent positions:

E7C: They have not had problems with Fins at all, but they have had problems with each other.

Really?

E7C: So, they are changing sometimes their shift, so they don't have to see each other or one guy even left the community because he was so angry at one of the other guys. So that is one of the things that takes place in Finnish working culture as well but maybe it's about the mentality of the guys that they get it so personally or... (E7C)

The true cause of this conflict bears further research, but it was brought to my attention that one possible reason for this conflict could be that more senior members of the "community"

were put in positions of power over newer members. They were not, however, given any concrete show of power in the form of increased pay or title. The emerging intragroup conflict warrants further study.

6.3 Practical Implications

A report released by the Local and Regional Government of Finland, dated the 7th of January 2016, acknowledges that “third sector actors need funding tools that will secure the continuity of integration work” (Local and Regional Government in Finland, 2016, 10). It also admits that “the most important means of integrating adult immigrants is integration training implemented as labor market adult education (ibid). This proves that the government is aware of the influence of third-sector actors, like Startup Refugees. It recognizes that third-sector actors do contribute to the successful integration of asylum seekers and refugees and do merit funding. However, dissension stems from who will fund future operations.

This study clearly explains the role of SUR in the integration of asylum seekers into the Finnish labor market. It also identifies a number of challenges different stakeholders face in the integration process. The practical implications would be that the organization serves a purpose and merits funding, it is beyond the scope of this study to say where that funding should come from or if the organization should in fact enter into the private sector. However, given recent highly publicized scandals involving NGOs around the world, it stands to reason that wherever the funding comes from SUR should continue to be transparent about where those funds are going. Additionally, the findings suggest that the informal structure of the organization can lead to employees feeling overwhelmed by too much freedom and not enough direction, this has the potential to lead to employee burnout. This should be taken into consideration as the organization develops.

A SWOT (Strengths, Opportunities, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) Analysis is a widely recognized strategic planning technique used in business or project planning. *Figure 6* applies this technique to the case of SUR, effectively summarizing its place in the market. The first box on the top left-hand side documents SUR’s strengths. The organization already has significant social capital within Finland and is set to expand to other regions in Europe. It has

a relatively stable source of funding from existing projects and is continually developing new strategies to secure funding. As some of the participants mentioned they do have a good working relationship with a number of governmental offices, including the TE-Office and the police. It also has a strong mission statement: help asylum seekers and refugees find employment in Finland.

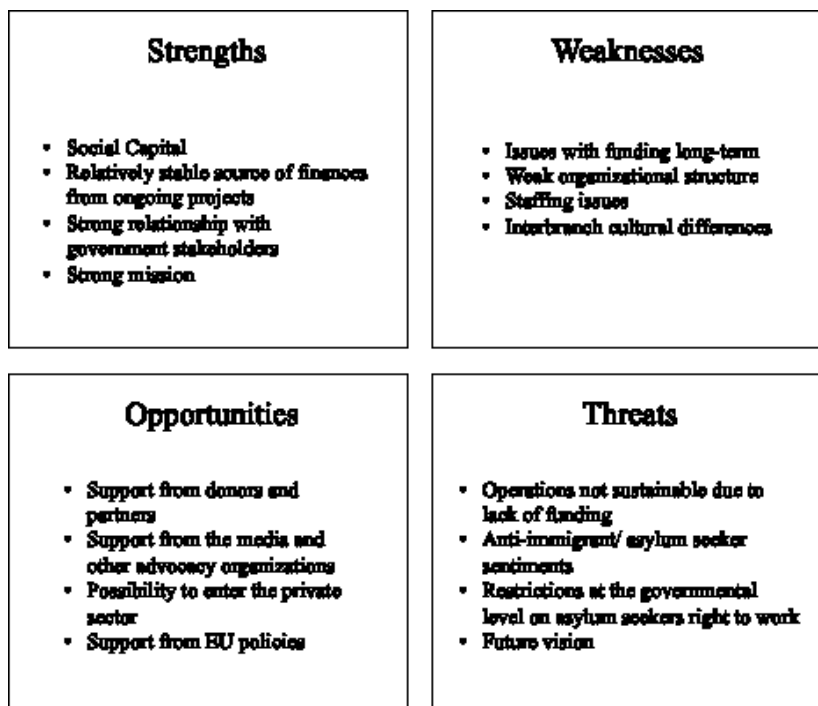


Figure 6: SWOT analysis of SUR

The top right-hand box examines SUR current weaknesses. There are issues with continuity, as was mentioned by two of the SUR workers. This can have negative consequences on employee morale moving forward. In this box I also list weak organizational structure, as I have said this can lead to feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy in employees. Staffing issues refers to a lack of personal, the organization has a wide breadth of services and, therefore, it would benefit from more workers on staff. However, over the past few months the amount of people on staff has continued to rise, the problem now is that the organization does experience relatively high turnover rate. This should be monitored for future reference. Additionally, there can be some interbranch conflict. This has yet to fester but it is important to be aware of differences and work with them not against them, encouraging open and honest communication between branches.

The bottom left hand corner lists the opportunities for SUR moving forward. The first item listed is support from donors and partners. SUR has always been a network therefore support from partners has always been both a strength and an opportunity. Due to issues related to privacy it is important for the organization to protect the identities of its partners, however, leveraging successful partnerships is a great way to help expand the network and broker new contracts. Support from the media and advocacy organizations relates to this point. The organization has partnered with other non-profit organizations and should continue to engage in such activities. I list the possibility of entering into the private sector as a possible opportunity, it bears further research but if the organization was able to sell its services to different municipalities it could help cover staffing costs and allow the organization to expand. The final point in this box is support from EU policies. The EU is looking for innovative solutions to integration problems that can be easily transferable to other European cities.

The bottom right box in *Figure 6* identifies four threats to the organization. In this I have included the obvious issue of funding, which I have elaborated on at length throughout this study. I also include anti-immigrant/asylum seeker sentiments. The recent string of crimes in Northern Finland has left the general population distrustful of asylum seekers and the rise of right-wing nationalism is a threat to all immigrants. I have mentioned several times the threat of new restrictionist policies on the rights of asylum seekers to work by the government, which poses a threat to all of the stakeholder groups discussed here. The final threat is related to the future vision of SUR. There have been a number of talks on how the organization will evolve, will it expand to cover all immigrants in Finland, will it privatize. There are an infinite number of possibilities it is important that the organization has a clear directive taking into account what is best for all its stakeholders.

In terms of practical policy implications, the findings here support the continual allowance of asylum seekers to work in Finland. It also suggests implementing policies, which support companies who hire asylum seekers. Particularly, in cases where there are no other workers available to them, this could be in the form of a tax break or working with their local municipality to find housing for employees brought in from other regions. The government should also provide clear detailed instructions if and when policies change and provide an accessible guide for those impacted by changes in laws regarding asylum seekers. SUR offers support for the companies it works for by contacting the Finnish Immigration Service directly, however without them it would be difficult for companies to stay up to date on changes. There

should also be a way for highly skilled and motivated asylum seekers who find work to stay in the country. The practice of keeping them on shortened contracts thereby preventing them from applying for work-based residency is cruel. The next section will disclose the limitations of this study.

6.4 Limitations

Any qualitative study of this nature is subject to certain limitations. The first limitation of this study relates to my inexperience as a researcher, which is evident in the first two interviews taken for this study. Those interviews were both with asylum seekers, which skewed the data gathered from that stakeholder group. I made the decision to still include this data, however, I did not lean on this data when analyzing my findings. Instead, I selected extracts, which supported patterns I identified based on interactions with a number of other asylum seekers during my time in the field.

A second related limitation concerns language. All but two of the interviews were held in English, which was not any of the participants' mother tongue. The effect of this was the most evident in the first two asylum seekers interviewed, however, SR6 also remarked that it was difficult for her to adequately express herself in English. Although, in the case of SR6 this was not expressly evident in the recorded conversation. In two of the employer interviews there was a translator present. Although, upon cross-examination of the recordings by another translator there were at least two instances with E4B where the direct question was not fully translated. This was not identified as an issue with E5A as one of the employers did speak English. There were a number of technical terms which participants did not know the English translations for these words were intentionally left into the extracts selected for discussion and translated for clarity.

Another potential limitation related to language includes to access and sample size. This is based on the fact that I was limited by not speaking Finnish or the Arabic, thus limiting the number of participants I could interview. This also impacted the literature that was available to me, as some studies were only available in Finnish. I was able to use translation services

and modern technology to help circumvent these shortcomings, however, it was still a factor barring notice.

The utmost care was taken to avoid including identifying features that may distinguish participants' identities. The use of codes was employed to make it easier to identify links between participants and to shield their identities, it was not meant to objectify those involved. Due to the precarious legal position of asylum seekers it was decided not to cause undue psychological strain by asking them to sign a document written in a language they are not entirely comfortable in, instead participants were verbally informed of their rights to withdraw from the study at any time.

Although often regarded as more of a preliminary step towards specific and focused causal research to generate a hypothesis, the use of an exploratory multi-stakeholder case study aids in the development of a necessary definitions, frameworks and hypotheses for subsequent explanatory research (Encyclopedia of Case Study Research, 2010, 373). In terms of transferability, as I have said this study relates to a specific case and was not designed to generalize across cases. However, it adds to a growing body of evidence, which suggests that employment may have a positive impact on the integration of asylum seekers in their host countries. I also advocate for the continued use of a multi-stakeholder approach to this issue. It helps to put the asylum situation into context.

The results of this study are supported by data triangulation, in which I employed different sources of information to increase the validity of this study. The data was derived from semi-structured interviews from three different stakeholder groups: asylum seekers, employers, and third-sector employees. During the analysis feedback from the stakeholder groups was used to determine areas of agreement and divergence. The conclusion of which is that the findings of this study warrant further exploration. Recommendations for future studies will be discussed in the following section.

6.5 Future Research Suggestions

There remains much to be explored relating to the topic of asylum seeker and refugee integration. Particularly, regarding the impact of work or participation in labor market specific initiatives during the asylum process. The long-term implications for asylum seekers who were employed while their asylum case was being processed should be studied on a larger scale. It would also be relevant to examine the potential impact of asylum seekers on the host countries economy in greater detail.

One of the challenges I identify in this research is that of the lack of clear structure in the organization SUR. R.H. Chenhall et al (2010, 750) uses the concept of social capital to understand how management control systems (MCS), such as the application of formal financial control practices, can be employed to reinforce adherence to core organizational values. Although, the application of MCS in SUR is beyond the scope of this study however, this does warrant further research to examine if the application of such controls would help or hinder the organization.

Additionally, there should be a more complete longitudinal study, which examines all of the asylum seekers who have been employed through SUR and tracks their progress. This study should assess: if the person has remained in Finland, if their asylum application was accepted, if they received a work-based residence permit, and a number of other economic and socio-economic dimensions. This study should be explanatory building off the work presented here to establish a body of literature about the employment of asylum seekers.

7 Conclusion

Research on this topic leaves much to be desired in terms of concrete results, in the form of policy changes supporting asylum seekers rights. The findings of this research support the idea that asylum seekers can contribute to the economy of their host societies. At this point asylum seekers are considered to be a drain on the state. However, adopting the mindset that they could instead be a gain for the state may help ease tensions while boosting the economy. Simply acknowledging that asylum seekers are people with potential and creating a system around them could have dramatic consequences. There should be a better system in place globally for people fleeing violence and persecution, who want a better life and who are willing to work for it. Evidence suggests that the faster refugees are integrated into society the better the result for both the individual and the community. This implies that starting this process early on in the asylum process may dramatically improve results.

If there was a system in place that extended beyond national borders, which recognized the practical and educational skills of asylum seekers it would be easier for them to be resettled in any country or region. So that people who arrive in Finland, even if they do not stay, can go on to another country or even back to their old country and help create a better city, a better country, a better world for us all. It sounds like such a lofty, idealistic goal, however, supporting institutions that are investing in the education and employment of asylum seekers is one step forward in achieving this goal. It also means creating a system where these organizations are not just blindly trusted but are held to account and forced to be transparent with both their practices and their finances. Allport's description of the failure of community organizations in the 1940s is a reminder that the best intentions without a concerted effort and proper training will not stop intergroup conflict. It requires concrete goals and objectives along with specialized training in how to effect change.

The time in-between serves as a reminder that the future of the men in this study, and the millions of men and women like them, remains uncertain. They are all struggling to build a new life in a foreign land, whether it be in Finland, Germany, the United States or anywhere they can find peace. Asylum seekers are simply hoping for a better life. The time in between - the minutes, hours, days, weeks, even years - spent waiting for a decision does not have to be in vain. The potential lost, when we leave people to rot in a reception center wasting away

thinking about what could have, should have, or might have been, is a loss for all of humanity.

In the end, we are a collection of imperfect people haplessly attempting to build a better society. In order to accomplish this, we must always be willing to critically evaluate ourselves in order to learn from our mistakes. It is my hope that this work serves to inform the debate surrounding refugee and asylum issues. In the end, I can see no more worthy endeavor than continuing the conversation in pursuit of a humane solution to the global refugee crisis.

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Appendix 1

MATCH

1

2

3

Some important info before we start....

With Match, you can access the opportunities offered by Startup Refugees, by simply filling in your information on this page.

Please fill out your profile carefully, since it is the only way for us to get information on what are your personal necessities. We cannot promise opportunities for everyone, but we do promise to do our best.

BACK

NEXT

MATCH

Designed by Futurice
Built by Haaga-Helia & Futurice
Powered with Chilicorn Fund
[Privacy Policy](#)

MATCH

✓

2

3

Make sure all your information is correct and always updated!

You will get a CV designed for the Finnish labour market in PDF format after filling out your profile. It will help you with searching for work independently.

You will also find it here, everytime you will log in with your username and password. Make sure your information is always updated.

BACK

NEXT

MATCH

Designed by Futurice
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Powered with Chilicorn Fund
[Privacy Policy](#)



Personal info

1. Personal info

Given name(s)

Your first and middle name(s)

Last name

Your last name

Profile picture

Url to your public image

Birthday

Day Month Year

Where are you from?

Select

Gender

☒ Woman ☐ Man ☐ Other

Where do you live now?

Your current location

Phone number

Where do you live now?

Your current location

Phone number

+358505433293

Email

example@example.com

Do you have a valid passport?

☐ Yes (also if it is with the Finnish police)
☒ No

Residence permit in Finland

☐ I have a residence permit in Finland

Reception centre (where are you staying at the moment?)

Date of submitting your asylum application in Finland

Day Month Year

ID Number

NEXT



2. Languages

Finnish

How well do you know it?

Select a level

Swedish

How well do you know it?

Select a level

English

How well do you know it?

Select a level

ADD ANOTHER LANGUAGE



3. Education

What is your highest level of education?

☐ Doctoral degree

A doctorate degree is the highest level of academic degree. It commonly consists of a research degree that qualifies to teach at the university level.

☐ University degree

This is a degree qualification awarded on successful completion of a course of study in higher education, normally at a college or university.

☐ Vocational school

Non compulsory opinions of studies for practical postsecondary education and job training.

☐ Upper secondary school

High school offering general, technical, vocational, or college/university-preparatory courses.

☐ Elementary school (7 - 9)

Basic education for 7-9 grades

☐ Pre-School (1 - 6)

☐ Unknown or no education



4. Experience

Profession title for your CV

Your professional title.

- Add work experience
- Add volunteer experience

NEXT



5. Skills

Communications, Media & Marketing

- ☐ Advertising
- ☐ Content production
- ☐ Copywriting
- ☐ Film editing
- ☐ Filming
- ☐ Marketing
- ☐ Photo editing
- ☐ Photography
- ☐ Press
- ☐ Public appearance
- ☐ Public relations
- ☐ Radio production
- ☐ Social media
- ☐ TV production

Construction, Mechanics & Agriculture

- ☐ Animal care
- ☐ Carpentry
- ☐ Construction site cleaning
- ☐ Construction work
- ☐ Electrical work

[« Back](#)

5. Skills

MS Office	Excellent
<hr/>	
Email	Very Good
<hr/>	
Teaching	Good
<hr/>	
Cashier work	Mediocre
<hr/>	
Social media	Poor
<hr/>	
○	

Do you have any of these Finnish work certificates?

Alcohol passport (needed when working as responsible manager at a restaurant or bar)

- ☐ Yes, I have it
☐ No, but I need it
☒ No, I don't need it

Hygiene certificate (needed with any work where you have to handle food)

- ☐ Yes, I have it
☐ No, but I need it
☒ No, I don't need it

Occupational safety card (needed for example in construction sites & warehouses)

- ☐ Yes, I have it
☐ No, but I need it
☒ No, I don't need it

Fire work license (needed for example for welding)

- ☐ Yes, I have it
☐ No, but I need it
☒ No, I don't need it

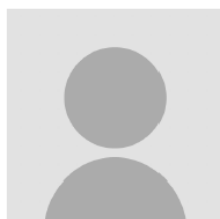
First aid certificate (good for social work & health care positions)

- ☐ Yes, I have it
☐ No, but I need it
☒ No, I don't need it

Road work safety card (for example snow workers, road construction work)

- ☐ Yes, I have it

Appendix 2



Professional Chef

Redacted address - Iraq



ABOUT ME

I am a hard working and highly motivated person. I work with punctuality and respect towards my work. I am social and friendly towards my colleagues.

WORK EXPERIENCE

Professional Chef at Self employed entrepreneur

I had my own restaurant where made traditional arabic food. My restaurant was popular. I had one employee. I can handle meat food very well, chicken, lamb etc. Also I can handle fish dishes.

Painting work at Medicine college in Baghdad

I worked as a painter in this educational facility,

Butcher at Butcher shop in Baghdad

Slaughtering and processing the meat. Also selling the meat was part of my job.

Electrical work at Medical College in Baghdad

My work was to change the main switches to the facility and take care of the heaters etc.

2017 – 2018 Housekeeping work at N Clean

I worked as a hotel cleaner.

2016 – 2016 Professional Chef at Al Noor Kemijärvi

I worked in the kitchen as the main cook of the restaurant.

EDUCATION

2008 – 2015 Upper Secondary School

SKILLS

Email Good

Child care within family Good

Professional cooking Excellent

Kitchen work Excellent

Washing dishes Excellent

Sales Excellent

Driving (taxi / other) Good

Groundskeeping Good

Cleaning Excellent

Painting Excellent

Electrical work Good

Storage work Good

Leadership Excellent

Entrepreneurship Excellent

Photography Good

LANGUAGES

Arabic Mother Tongue

Appendix 3

Asylum Seeker Interview Questions

1. How long have you been in Finland?
2. How long were you looking for a job?
3. How many jobs have you had here in Finland?
4. What previous work experience have you had?
5. Is the job you are doing related to any previous work experience that you may have had?
 1. If not would you like to return to your previous job?
 2. What would you need to do this?
 3. Would you be willing to undergo additional training?
6. How did Startup Refugees support you in getting this job?
7. Did you need to undergo any special training to get this job?
 1. What was it?
 2. How long did it take?
 3. Was it relevant?
 4. Did it cost any money?
 5. Do you feel like you need more training?
8. How have you adjusted to the job?
9. How do you get along with your coworkers?
10. Have you felt any cultural challenges that you needed to overcome?
11. What do you wish you would have known your first day on the job?
12. What additional training did you need after you started the job?
13. What was your best day on the job?
14. What was your worst day on the job?
15. What has been the most difficult thing about starting work in Finland?
16. Do you feel fulfilled in your work?
17. Do you have a residence permit?
18. How has working impacted the process of you getting a permit?
19. How has your work affected you personally?
20. What was the employment process like for you?
21. Did something change after you got the job?
22. Has it opened you up to Finnish society?
23. Has working life in Finland been different than you expected?
24. What permits are you applying for?
 1. Work-based?
 2. Asylum?

Employer Interview Questions

1. What, to you, makes a good employee?
2. What was the reason that you became interested in hiring asylum seekers?
 1. How many have you hired since?
 2. Would you consider hiring more in the future?
3. Can you tell me more about the first asylum seeker you hired?
 1. What was the hiring process like?
 2. Has it changed since?
 3. What did you learn from that experience?
4. So, how did you come to be involved with SUR?
5. Did you have any preconceptions about hiring asylum seekers?

1. Did anyone else at the company?
2. What did you expect?
3. Has this changed?
6. Was there any special training or assistance that these employees could have had before starting work?
 1. What is the process?
 2. Has it changed?
7. What on-site training have you had to provide for the asylum seekers hired?
 1. How was it carried out?
 2. Have there been any issues that have had to be overcome?
8. Was there any additional financial cost for training these new employees?
 1. Was it more than other employees?
 2. Did you seek any help from the government to cover these costs?
 3. Did the government offer you any help to cover these costs?
 4. Have you approached the municipality concerning these costs?
9. Originally, how many did you hire?
10. How has the employee(s) adjusted to the job?
11. Have there been any incidents on the job with any of these asylum seekers?
 1. What was it?
 2. How did you handle the situation?
 3. How will can you prevent this type of thing from happening again?
12. How do the asylum seekers interact with your Finnish employees?
13. Have there been any cultural differences that you have had to overcome?

SR6 Interview Questions

1. What drove you to pursue this type of work
2. What do you see as being an important issue in integration?
 1. From where?
 2. In what way?
 3. How can you do your job better?
3. If you were going to place an ad looking for someone to replace you what would you write as the job description?
4. What sort of skill set do you need to do this job?
5. Describe a typical day at work
6. Are there any big events that you can remember happening on the job
7. How did you come to be involved with SUR?
8. What has been the most challenging aspect of this work for you?
9. Have you been working with the Municipalities? In what way?
10. What about the local authorities? TE office?
11. What kind of support does the government provide for SUR?
 1. For the asylum seekers?
 2. For employers?
12. Do you experience stress at work?
 1. How do you deal with stress on the job?
13. Has it been difficult to find companies to work with?
14. How much/ what type of support has SUR been granted from the government?
15. Has the organization been in contact with the Center of Excellence in integration

SR8 and SR9 Interview Questions

1. How would you define integration?
2. How would you describe Finland's current policy regarding asylum seekers?
3. How did you come to become involved with SUR?
4. Have you seen the structure of the organization change since you first started working?
If so how?
5. What would you say is your role in the organization?
6. Tell me about your current project/ role
 1. What is it?
 2. Where is it?
 3. What have you done?
 4. What do you plan on doing?
7. What sort of feedback have you gotten from employers who have hired asylum seekers?
8. What would you say are the main reasons that an employer would hire a refugee or asylum seeker?
9. What sort of skills do you need to do at your job?
10. What has been the most challenging aspect of this work for you?
11. Do you experience stress at work?
 1. How do you deal with stress on the job?
12. Do you feel comfortable at work?
13. Have you been working with the Municipalities? In what way?
14. What about the local authorities? TE office?
15. What kind of support does the government provide for SUR, to your knowledge in terms of funding?
 1. Which ministries?
 2. What projects?
16. Where do you think the organization will be in 5 years?
 1. Will it look the same

Appendix 4

Informed consent for participating in research

This informed consent form is designed to provide you, as a research participant, with general information about this research. This includes the purpose of the research and your rights as a participant.

General information

My name is Mariah O'Mara I am a master's student studying Education and Globalization, in the Faculty of Education, at the University of Oulu. As a part of my studies, I am conducting a research regarding the integration of asylum seekers in Finland. The purpose of my research is to better understand the role of Startup Refugees in the integration of asylum seekers into working life in the Northern Ostrobothnian Region of Finland. I kindly request your consent for collecting information about the operation of the organization and its clients.

All information will be used anonymously, respecting the dignity of each participant. No personal details that would enable the identification of any participants will be included in the analyses and reporting. Systematic care in handling and storing the information will be ensured to avoid any kind of harm to you or anyone involved in this research. After all the information leading to identification of a person has been removed, the information will be destroyed after the thesis has been assessed and approved by the Faculty of Education and published.

Voluntary participation

Your participation is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the research at any time without any consequences. Observe that information collected before your withdrawal may be used. You have the right to get information about the research and may contact me if you have questions.

Confirming informed consent (USE BOXES THAT ARE RELEVANT, DELETE OTHERS)

I am willing to participate in the research.

I allow the use of interview for research purposes.

I allow the information that I have provided to be stored and archived for further research use.

I do not allow the information that I have provided to be stored and archived for further research use.

Date ____/____/20____

Signature and name (in capital letters)

Researcher

Signature

Name, email, phone

This thesis research is supervised by:

Elina Lehtomäki, Professor of Global Education

More information about research ethics and informed consent:

Finnish Board on Research Integrity

<http://www.tenk.fi/en/ethical-review-in-human-sciences>